Spotlight on Drama

A teaching and resource guide to Canadian plays

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Spotlight on Drama

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A teaching and resource guide to Canadian plays

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The Writers' Development Trust

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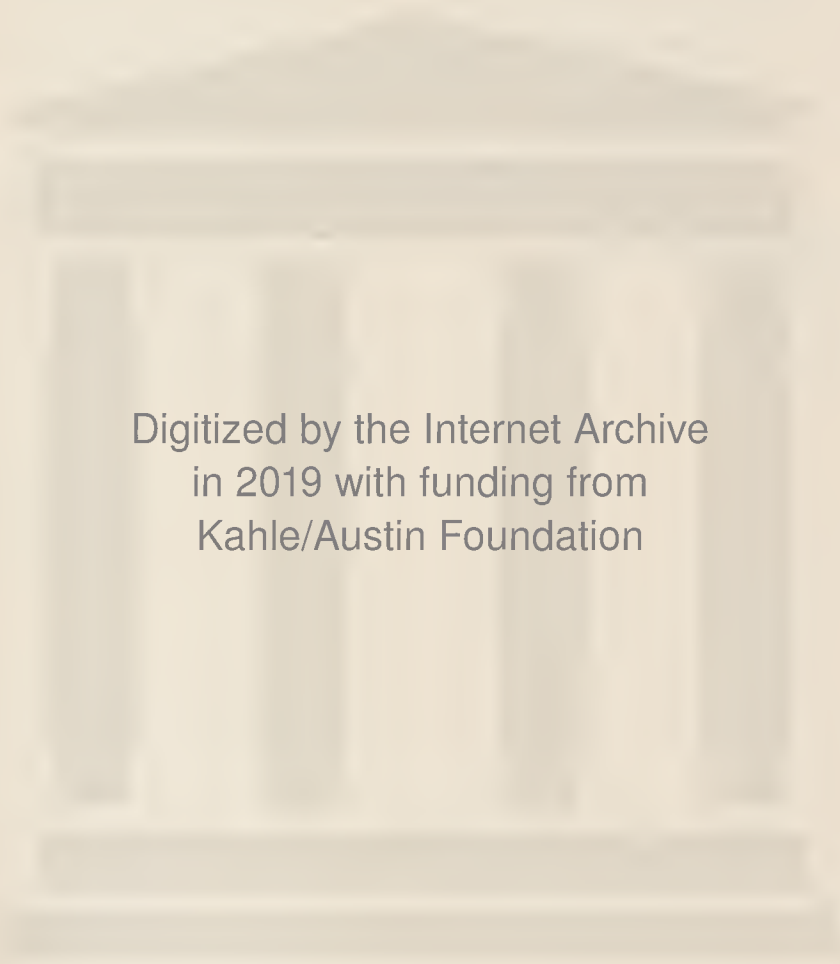

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Introduction

Playwriting is a lively art form in Canada today with theatres and specialized writers' groups developing and promoting the scripts of playwrights in every region. Hundreds of Canadian plays have been published and are available for scrutiny. These works have a life not only in production but, as *Spotlight on Drama* illustrates, as literature as well.

This resource guide, the eleventh in the Writers' Development Trust series, is divided into eleven chapters and was prepared by committees of playwrights and teachers from the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairie and West Coast regions of Canada. There is diversity in the format of the chapters as a result, and also as a response to the varying subject matter. Some chapters are thematic in approach, others are performance oriented. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a general overview of the history of theatre in Canada with particular detailed emphasis on the emergence of Canadian playwrights across the country since the late 1960s. Subsequent chapters discuss the drama that has been produced by these several hundred writers and theatres.

The listings in *Spotlight on Drama* are by no means exclusive. There are other plays available that may suit your teaching goals better than the ones we have used. You may also find that a play listed in the Family chapter can be used to study Historical themes or that the classroom study questions of one chapter can be adapted to another. Acting and directing exercises suggested for some of the works may also be suitable for many other plays as well. Please feel free to mix and match to suit yourself and your students.

Spotlight on Drama is intended as a resource guide for teachers from the primary grades to the high school and college level. Plays have been selected for their dramatic merit and for their ability to interest and stimulate students. Some of the suggested plays pose a problem because of their strong language and action. While in no case do we consider the question of language and action used to be separable from the question of a situation being honestly presented, this may not, in fact, be enough to recommend a play to you for classroom study. In our synopses and questions we have tried to give a reasonably clear assessment of the total value of the plays. Ultimately, the choice of any of these works as classroom texts or resource books rests with you, the teacher.

While each chapter stands on its own, we suggest that teachers familiarize themselves with the entire guide. You will notice some overlapping of scripts; check the Index for additional references to the plays.

Spotlight on Drama concludes with a Resources section in which censorship, obtaining production rights and our copyright laws are discussed. Canadian play publishers, touring programmes, play catalogues, anthologies, manuals and films, as well as a play title Index, are also included in this section.

Your local library already should have many of the plays discussed in this resource guide for your initial reading. (If it doesn't, ask your librarian to order the titles you would like to see.) As *Spotlight on Drama* indicates, the field of Canadian drama is a rapidly growing one. We are confident that you and your students will find the effort to get to know Canadian playwrights and their work ultimately rewarding.

Constance Brissenden, Editor

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1.

Theatre in Canada to 1969

The history of theatre in Canada since the early 1600s is such an extensive and varied one that only a general pattern and some highlights of its development can be presented in this brief account. This cursory survey nevertheless provides a helpful background for teachers of contemporary Canadian theatre and drama.

As might be expected, the spread of theatre from the eastern seaboard to British Columbia is intimately related with the settlement of the continent by early French and English explorers and colonists. Sir Humphrey Gilbert's expedition to Newfoundland in 1583 already included musicians, dancers and jesters performing on board ship and on land 'for solace of our people and allurement of the Savages ... whom we intended to win by all fair means possible.' But the beginning of actual live theatre and playwriting in Canada dates to Marc Lescarbot's masque *Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France* (*The Theatre of Neptune in New France*) presented at Port Royal, Acadia, on November 14, 1606. Masques of a similar nature were also presented in Quebec City during the 1600s, celebrating the arrival of the new French governor of the colony, the loyalty of the settlers and native peoples and the glory awaiting France in the New World.

Besides these periodic ceremonial 'receptions', theatre in Quebec was largely confined to Catholic colleges and the governor's court in Quebec City (until the arrival of English military garrisons following the English conquest in 1763). Under the sponsorship of the governor in Quebec City, plays by Corneille, Racine and Molière were enacted by members of the French military garrison for the colony's high society in the 1600s. The Jesuit colleges taught declamation of appropriate religious texts to their young students for moral and educational purposes. But the Catholic church strongly opposed all actual theatrical representations since they were thought to encourage idleness and sin. In 1694, when Governor Frontenac attempted to stage Molière's *Tartuffe*, a satire on religious hypocrisy, Bishop Saint-Vallier succeeded in forcing him to withdraw the production. (Robertson Davies has dramatized this incident in his one-act drama *Hope Deferred.*) The fierce opposition of the Catholic church to live theatre seriously affected the growth of theatre and drama in Quebec until the 1950s. For a complete history of Quebec theatre from the 1600s to the 1970s, teachers may consult the excellent study *Le Théâtre Canadien-Français* published by Fides in Montreal in 1976.

One of the first regional studies of theatre in English-Canada was Murray Edwards' pioneering *A Stage in Our Past, English-Language Theatre in Eastern Canada from the 1790s to 1914* (University of Toronto Press, 1968). Edwards' book demonstrates a general pattern in the growth of live theatre characteristic of every province in the 1800s and early 1900s. The first theatre performances (beginning in Halifax in 1787, St. John, N.B. in 1789 and in St. John's, Newfoundland, Charlottetown, P.E.I. and Toronto in the early 1800s) were invariably by amateurs, usually 'a company of gentlemen' composed of officers of the English military garrison and local settlers. Performing spaces initially were of a makeshift nature seating less than one hundred persons and were usually attached to inns or ale houses. As theatre became more popular, converted performing spaces became larger, leading to the construction of regular theatres seating several hundred. The increased demand for theatre performances encouraged the formation of amateur dramatic societies and visits by professional actors from England and the United States performing by themselves or with the local amateurs.

Because of the later settlement of British Columbia and the Prairies, this initial growth of Canadian theatre began only in the 1850s in Victoria and in the 1860s in Winnipeg. In eastern Canada, the increasing population in the larger cities led to the construction of more and more elaborate theatres such as the 1,000-seat Theatre Royal built by John Molson and others in Montreal in 1825. Box-office income from these larger theatres made it profitable for English, French and American stars and companies to tour to Canada. The famous English actor Edmund Kean appeared with local amateurs at the Theatre Royal in Montreal only a year after it opened and the first professional French touring company played there in 1827. By the 1800s (particularly after

the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway) all the larger cities across Canada and even many smaller towns had elaborate 'opera houses' seating from 1,000 to 2,000 people. (Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theatre, built in 1907, is one of the few such theatres still in operation and still features mainly American and British touring productions.)

Theatre in the late 1800s (like the cinema today) became big business, particularly for the American touring syndicates which owned or leased many of the larger theatres across Canada and controlled the stars and the expensive touring shows which attracted an audience. With a relatively small population spread out over thousands of miles, Canadians found it impossible to compete economically and artistically with the foreign touring companies (and great stars such as Henry Irving, Sarah Bernhardt and John Martin-Harvey) which dominated Canadian theatre from the 1860s to the 1920s. While the great majority of plays presented in Canada from the 1600s to the 1900s were by French, British and American authors, Canadian plays were also being written, published and often performed by Canadian amateur companies. Many of these authors were actors working with performing companies, journalists or poets.

Ten 19th century English-Canadian plays are now available in print in the first two volumes of the Canada's Lost Plays series, *The Nineteenth Century* and *Women Pioneers* (Canadian Theatre Review Publications). Of the ten, the most widely performed and still most accessible is William Henry Fuller's *H.M.S. Parliament or The Lady Who Loved a Government Clerk.* An adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic *H.M.S. Pinafore,* this play satirizes Sir John A. Macdonald and toured in a professional production in 1880 by the Eugene McDowell Company to over two dozen cities from the Maritimes to Winnipeg.

The general dominance of North American theatre by New York touring syndicates began to diminish in 1905 although 310 professional productions were still touring from New York. Of course, only a portion of these included Canadian cities on their circuits. Already by the outbreak of World War I, less than one hundred productions toured from New York and, in 1920, only thirty-nine. This demise of the American touring companies has been attributed to a decline in the quality of the productions themselves, the disruption caused by W.W. I, and the growing popularity of Vaudeville, radio and the silent movies. The economic hardships of the Depression and increased competition from 'talking pictures' in the 1930s virtually eliminated foreign touring companies from most of Canada until after W.W. II.

The positive result was that amateur little theatres sprang up all across Canada to fill the theatrical vacuum. The most prominent of these companies were the Arts and Letters Club Players directed by Roy Mitchell in Toronto from 1908 to 1914, the Ottawa Drama League founded in 1913, the University of Toronto's Hart House Theatre which commenced productions in 1919, the

Community Players of Winnipeg founded in 1921, the Vancouver Little Theatre in 1922 and the Edmonton Little Theatre and the Montreal Repertory Theatre in 1929. All of these little theatres produced not only classics, popular comedies and dramas from the international repertoire but also actively encouraged the writing and production of Canadian plays. As the theatre critic (and later playwright) Fred Jacob noted in an article entitled 'Waiting for a Dramatist' published in the June 1914 *Canadian Magazine*, 'Canada still lacks a dramatist, and it will not be possible for us to claim that our self-expression is complete until some aspect of the life of the nation has been placed behind the foot-lights.'

With the increased production opportunities offered by Canadian little theatres, dozens of playwrights began to write for the theatre in the 1920s, '30s and '40s. The most important English-Canadian playwright of the 1920s was Merrill Denison (1893-1975) whose plays were staged at Hart House and many other little theatres. In their 1924 *Highways of Canadian Literature*, J.D. Logan and Donald French judged the publication of Denison's play anthology *The Unheroic North* the preceding year 'a significant beginning of creative Stage Drama in Canada.' In addition to three one-act comedies, Denison's *Unheroic North* contained the first significant 20th century Canadian social problem play *Marsh Hay*. The drama depicts a family's unsuccessful struggle to escape the poverty and cultural backwardness of a northern Ontario farm. Because of its frank and realistic portrayal of family conflict, the play was not produced until 1974 at Hart House Theatre.

Other playwrights active from the 1930s to the present include Lois Reynolds (1908-) who was a prominent member of the Playwrights' Studio Group which produced only Canadian plays at Hart House Theatre in the 1930s; Herman Voaden (1903-) whose directing, playwrighting and founding of the Play Workshop in Toronto in 1934 sought to develop 'a distinctly Canadian art of the theatre'; John Coulter (1888-1980) whose Irish folk comedy *The House in the Quiet Glen* swept the Dominion Drama Festival awards in 1937; Gwen Pharis Ringwood (1910-), the most prominent prairie playwright best known for her dramas *Still Stands the House* and *Dark Harvest*; and Robertson Davies (1913-) whose plays from the late 1940s to the present deal extensively with the state of Canadian culture and the role of the artist in society. (The work of these dramatists and the theatre of the period is described in the third volume of the Canada's Lost Plays series, *The Developing Mosaic: English-Canadian Drama to Mid-Century*.) For a complete thematically annotated listing of the published works of English-Canadian playwrights, teachers can consult *The Brock Bibliography of Published Canadian Plays in English 1766-1978*, published by Playwrights Canada.

During W.W. II, many little theatres ceased operating or diverted their energies to entertain troops with light-hearted revues. The Dominion Drama Festival which had brought little theatre groups together for national play

competitions since 1933, also suspended its national activities until after the war. While Canada's participation in W.W. II contributed significantly to the development of a distinct national political consciousness and a national identity in English-Canada, Canadian artists were still far in advance of the general public in attempting to develop a national culture. 'To be a Canadian playwright,' Robertson Davies recalls of his own work in the theatre in the late 1940s, 'was rather like being a parrot in a chicken-house; one was an oddity, of no easily understandable use, unwilling to concentrate on the primary business of laying nice white eggs ... it was widely agreed that there was an un-Canadian indecency about thrusting oneself upon the public as a writer of plays, and a theatre critic of Canada.'

Yet the post-war years also brought a large influx of European immigrants to Canada who had grown up with live theatre and who expanded audiences in Canada. Many, like John Hirsch, for example, later played important roles in the growth of theatre in the 1950s. Several directors long active with amateur theatre in Canada did attempt to form professional companies after W.W. II. Sydney Risk's Everyman Theatre Company toured the Prairies and British Columbia in 1946 and 1947. Dora Mavor Moore founded the New Play Society in Toronto in 1946 'to establish a living theatre in Canada on a professional but non-profit basis.' (One of its important productions in 1950 was John Coulter's historical drama *Riel*, revived by the National Arts Centre in 1975.) The government-subsidized CBC Radio which had enabled a considerable number of actors and playwrights to make a modest living since the late 1930s, virtually became Canada's national theatre with Andrew Allan's 'Stage' series first broadcast in January of 1944.

The federal government's recognition (prompted in part by active lobbying by Canadian artists and arts organizations) that culture must play an important part in the post W.W. II national reconstruction resulted in the 1949 Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences headed by Vincent Massey. The Commission's 1951 *Report* indicated that few Canadians could actually make a living in their chosen craft and were thus prevented from fully contributing to the growth of Canadian culture. In its chapter on Canadian theatre and drama, the *Report* noted that 'the drama has been in the past, and may be again, not only the most striking symbol of a nation's culture, but the central structure enshrining much that is finest in a nation's spiritual and artistic greatness'. The major recommendation of the Massey Commission, the creation of a government financed but politically independent 'Canada Council for the Arts, Letters, Humanities and Social Sciences', was implemented by an Act of Parliament in 1957. The rapid expansion in the arts and proliferation of professional theatre companies across Canada since then has been due in great part to subsidies from the Canada Council and other provincial and civic arts councils.

Government subsidies in the 1960s gave a degree of financial stability to semi-professional companies of the 1950s and gradually there was a move to professional status. The Massey Commission's 1951 *Report* had already noted the fine professional work of Les Compagnons de Saint Laurent in Quebec, the Western Stage Society in Saskatoon and the Canadian Repertory Theatre in Ottawa. In 1952, the beginning of CBC Television broadcasts greatly expanded work opportunities for actors and playwrights. The founding of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival by Tom Patterson and artistic director Tyrone Guthrie in 1953 gave Canadian actors the opportunity of working with an internationally acclaimed director and stars such as Alec Guiness, Irene Worth and Douglas Campbell. Out of Stratford developed the touring Canadian Players under Douglas Campbell's direction. In 1954, Murray and Donald Davis founded the important Crest Theatre in Toronto. While most professional companies appearing in Toronto in the 1950s lasted only for short periods, Toronto Workshop Productions founded by George Luscombe in 1959 is now in its third decade of play production.

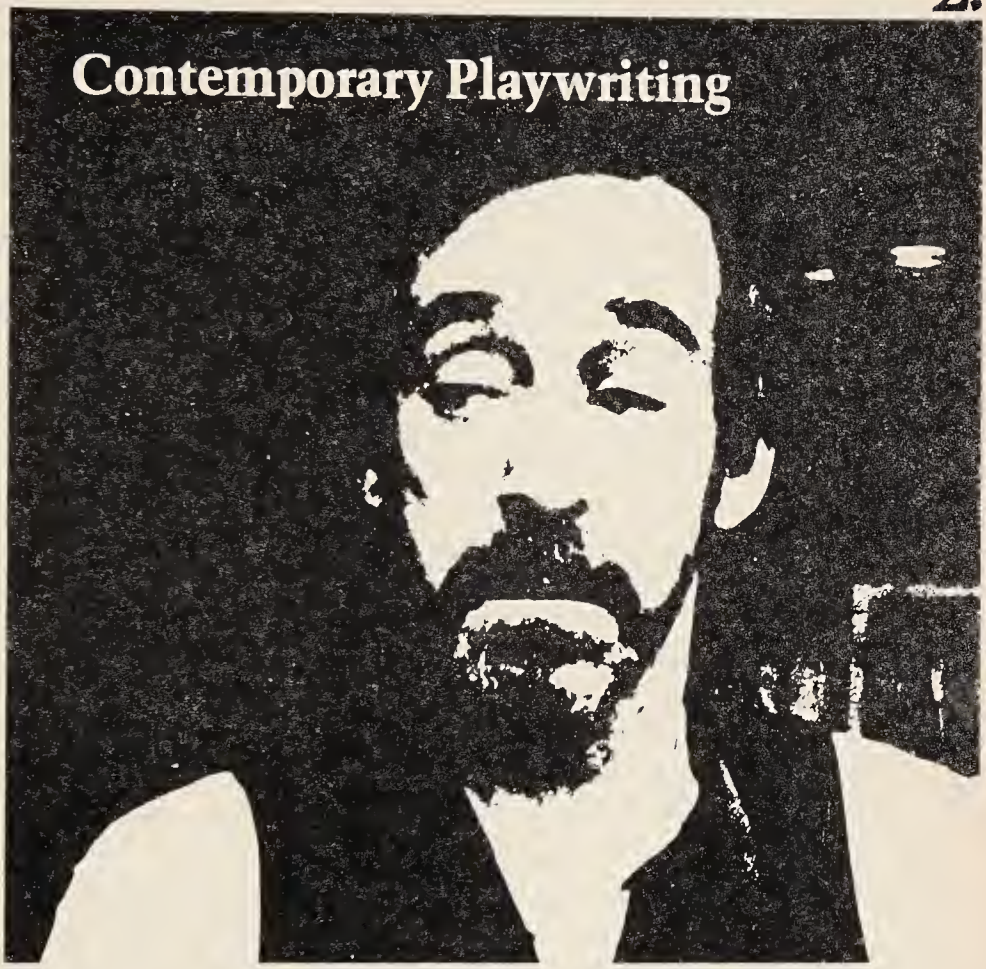
Another important stage in the development of English-Canadian theatre was reached with the founding of the Manitoba Theatre Centre by John Hirsch and Tom Hendry in Winnipeg in 1958. Other civic and regional theatres like the Vancouver Playhouse, the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton, Toronto's St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Theatre New Brunswick and Neptune Theatre in Halifax followed the MTC's lead in aiming to achieve the highest professional acting, directing and production standards. As part of the 1967 Centennial Celebrations, many civic theatres received special government funds for the construction of regular playhouses. These civic centres usually contained a main stage (seating less than 900) and a second stage seating only several hundred for more small-scale productions.

While these playhouses provided actors and audiences with more intimate performing spaces than the previous huge unsubsidized auditoriums (like the Jubilee auditoriums in Edmonton and Calgary, Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theatre and Toronto's O'Keefe Centre), the smaller civic playhouses were just as expensive to operate and therefore tended to be conservative in their programming. Their main stage usually featured the classic repertoire and the latest popular American and British comedies and dramas while the occasional Canadian play was most often shunted to the second stage. It was in great part a reaction against this conservative programming that a younger generation of actors, directors and playwrights launched the 'alternate' theatre movement in Toronto in 1969. Beginning with Theatre Passe Muraille that year and Ken Gass' Factory Theatre Lab in 1970, groups sprang up across Canada to produce socially more relevant and innovative drama and particularly to feature new Canadian plays.

Prepared by Anton Wagner.

2.

Contemporary Playwriting



Ontario:

Toronto now offers audiences more theatre activity than any other city in North America after New York City. On any night during the season, newspapers list over thirty professional productions; twenty years ago it would have been difficult to discover more than a half-dozen such productions at one time. But what is even more remarkable is the growing interest in new Canadian drama. Whereas it was once only a very few lucky playwrights who would actually see their work staged, today theatres are actively seeking out new plays, audiences are turning out for them, and more than a few Canadian plays have become huge hits.

But much of this has happened very recently. Historically, Canada hasn't exactly provided the most welcoming atmosphere to her dramatists. As recently as the mid-1960s it was unusual for a theatre to actually stage a new Canadian play. Our theatres relied heavily for their fare upon imported works and there was only minimal awareness of a distinct Canadian drama. The Canadian play remained an oddity for a long time, and the playwrights often vanished back into oblivion after an initial production.

It's appropriate that Toronto, the communications centre of the country, should be the focal point for the Canadian drama surge of the last decade. It was here that a cluster of little theatres and workshops first started that were devoted to Canadian playwriting. And around these places there developed a community of playwrights, directors, designers, and actors who were very unique ... they were nourished on a diet of plays written by Canadians.

In reviewing indigenous drama in Toronto since 1960 there are two names which first come to mind: George Luscombe and John Herbert. Toronto Workshop Productions, which was founded by Luscombe in 1959, was the pioneer 'alternate' theatre. With leftist political sentiments and influenced by the British director Joan Littlewood, Luscombe staged productions that were very distinctive. John Herbert wrote a play which is the most important single work in the development of a national dramatic consciousness, in terms of the Toronto scene at least. It was *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, a hard-hitting, abrasive look at the underside of prison life complete with all its rawness, violence and sexual politics. Encouraged by the *Toronto Star*'s very influential critic, Nathan Cohen, Herbert shaped his play into a full work. *Fortune and Men's Eyes* had its first professional production in the United States, finally arriving as a touring production in Toronto. In 1975, when *Fortune* was given a second professional production in Toronto, it received the Chalmers Canadian Play Award as the 'outstanding play' of that year. The first appearance of this play contributed to a new awareness of the value of a national dramaturgy. Within a few years the playwriting forces would begin to emerge.

How did it all come about? There were many factors. The country was maturing to the point where it was taking a new pride in itself. After the success of Expo this sense of national self-confidence grew and there was a decided interest in things Canadian, from movies, to painting, to theatre. A generation of university graduates and drama students surfaced who weren't pursuing traditional goals ... they were more concerned with working in a distinctly Canadian theatre and there were even some who were willing to work very hard to see that it came about. The late '60s and early '70s were also years of bureaucratic largesse with the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council willing to support fledgling theatre projects. Many theatres also sprung up on grants from Opportunities for Youth or on Local Initiatives Projects money.

Of course, the Toronto theatres which were dedicated to producing new Canadian drama started off in cramped, dusty quarters in unlikely parts of the city. The very first such theatre, The Factory Theatre Lab, was located above a garage that backed on a railway track. It was founded by Ken Gass and its motto was 'Home of the Canadian Playwright'.

The Factory staged full productions and workshops and among the first works presented there was a short play, *Creeps*, which dealt with life in a sheltered workshop for the handicapped. The author was David Freeman, himself a victim of cerebral palsy, and in his play, he presented a vivid, humorous and pathetic view of a system which robs people of their dignity and causes enormous frustrations. *Creeps* was the first play out of the Factory to receive national attention.

Larry Fineberg and George F. Walker are two other important playwrights who started out at the Factory. Montreal-born Fineberg came to Toronto after spending some years working in New York theatre. His first work was *Stonehenge*, a bitingly acerbic comedy about life among the Jewish upper classes and his subsequent plays have been marked by the same savage humor and a disquieting sense of sadness about life's dead-ends and absurdities. In 1976, the Stratford Festival staged his adaptation of Constance Beresford-Howe's novel *The Book of Eve* for the stage and *Eve* has since been seen in a number of other cities.

From George F. Walker comes a cartoonesque sensibility. Walker sends up cultural myths, pokes fun at literary and filmic genres, and produces gaudy, flamboyant plays that often seem like a staged comic book. In *Bagdad Saloon* he mixed together Gertrude Stein, Doc Halliday, Henry Miller and Aladdin, and in *Beyond Mozambique*, a character from a Chekhov play, a porno movie star, an RCMP officer plus a one-time Nazi physician. Walker's most successful work to date is *Zastrozzi*, a wild gothic story full of swashbuckling action, a nasty anti-hero, and delicate heroines.

An early director at the Factory was Bill Glassco, a university professor who went on to found the Tarragon Theatre in 1971. He opened the theatre with a rewritten version of David Freeman's *Creeps*. The play was awarded the first Chalmers Canadian Play Award in 1972 (established by cultural philanthropist Floyd S. Chalmers to support the outstanding Canadian plays produced in the Toronto region each year).

Glassco developed a relationship with a number of playwrights which would put Tarragon in the forefront of the city's small theatres and bring in a loyal audience. The theatre quickly became associated with 'naturalistic drama,' perhaps because its most successful dramatist is David French. A Newfoundland native trained as an actor, French wrote a number of CBC-TV dramas before he attempted his first stage work, *Leaving Home*. That play, like French's subsequent *Of The Fields, Lately*, is part of a projected trilogy about the Mercer family, transplanted Maritimers who must adjust to life in Toronto and cope with the conflicts that tear them apart. Written with rare sensitivity, full of humor and telling insights into the characters, both plays became landmarks. French followed their great success with *One Crack Out*, about the low-life denizens of the pool-hall world, a translation of *The Seagull*

which was praised for its lyricism and close adherence to Chekhov and in 1979, his first comedy, *Jitters*. Set in a small Toronto theatre, *Jitters* is all about the hilarious trials of staging a new play, the disasters that can plague an opening night and the nerves that stalk playwrights and directors. It displays an uncommon gift and turned into a cross-Canada hit with a Broadway production planned for 1981.

Tarragon also became the place where a number of plays by Quebec authors were staged in English translations. The most produced of these playwrights is Michel Tremblay. The first two Tremblay plays to be done in Toronto were the lively *Les Belles Soeurs* about the madcap, funny, sad aftermath of a poor Montreal housewife's win of a million trading stamps, and *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou* a stark, cutting drama about the horrors of family life. Tremblay's most sensational drama was *Hosanna*, which vividly detailed the life of a flamboyant Montreal drag queen, and his/her relationship with a biker. The play electrified Tarragon audiences. Among Tremblay's other plays to be seen in Toronto have been *Bonjour, Là, Bonjour*; *Saint Carmen of the Main* (set among the night people in a sleazy part of Montreal) and *The Impromptu of Outremont*, the playwright's first excursion into the world of bourgeois Quebec. It's interesting to note that the rebel playwright, who was once a strong separatist, is one of Toronto's most popular dramatists; Tremblay's plays, although political in their undertones, are never strident and they have opened up a whole new world to his audiences here.

Poet James Reaney, of London, Ontario, won over a new collection of admirers in the 1970s when Tarragon staged his trilogy of plays about the infamous Donnelly family. Deeply seeped in the mythology of Southwestern Ontario, Reaney's work is highly poetic, whimsical, charged with a symbolism and imagery that is uncommon. Under the direction of Keith Turnbull, *The Donnellys* was a three-part marathon that painted a bright, abstract picture of the murders that occurred in a small Ontario town in the 19th century.

In 1968, Theatre Passe Muraille was founded in the basement of Rochdale College and, at first, specialized in daring, avant-garde drama chosen from the international scene. TPM soon moved to downtown quarters with a new artistic director, Paul Thompson, who set new goals revolving around the use of a collective approach to play creation. Thompson was especially anxious to apply these techniques to subjects that were not the usual materials for dramatic fare. Among those plays which came out of Thompson's collective cauldron were *1837 — The Farmer's Revolt, Doukhobors, The Farm Show, I Love You, Baby Blue,* and *Torontonians*. Often exuberantly staged, although not always well disciplined or formed, the collective technique is sometimes tagged 'Canadian documentary drama.'

Theatre Passe Muraille has always been open to unusual theatrical fare. Its Seed Show programme sponsors experimental or workshop productions of plays which have often tried to explore new areas. Among these writers is Hrant Alianak, whose works are strongly influenced by B-movies. Among his plays have been *Tantrums, Night, The Blues,* and *Passion and Sin,* all of which fail to conform to conventional dramatic expectations. Passe Muraille also produced Linda Griffiths' *Maggie and Pierre* (which dealt with a well-known couple's behind-the-headlines life) with its wide popular appeal.

Founded on a Local Initiatives Project grant and first maintained on a gratis box office principle, Toronto Free Theatre was formed by a trio of playwright-directors, Tom Hendry, Martin Kinch and John Palmer. Housed in a converted factory, Toronto Free Theatre did strongly flavored Canadian plays at first. Often the plays were physically and psychologically violent; sometimes they were political. Among the plays staged at the Free were Tom Hendry's *How Are Things With the Walking Wounded?,* set among decadent English Montrealers during Expo, and *Byron,* about an equally decadent collection of people centred around the English poet. From Martin Kinch came one of the Free's best new plays, *Me?,* an autobiographical drama focusing on the dilemmas a young writer faces when his love life closes in around him. And from John Palmer came the wild, hysterical *The End* about a group of colorful young neurotics. Programming at the Free has always been eclectic, especially in the theatre's early years.

Carol Bolt has been writing plays for over a decade, with her early work displaying her interest in Canadian historical subject matter (*Buffalo Jump, Gabe*). At Toronto Free, her play about early activist Emma Goldman (*Red Emma*) was a potent drama. Other plays presented at different theatres included a comedy about prairie women in politics (*Shelter*), a thriller about the singles-bar scene which met with great commercial success (*One Night Stand*), and a comedy about the Canadian film industry, *Escape Entertainment.* Erika Ritter has only had three plays staged in Toronto but her third proved to be one of the most popular plays ever written by a Canadian. In her play, *The Splits,* Ritter told the story of a young woman and the men who cluttered her life. The sharp comic lines were impressive and the playwright clearly had a grasp of structural complexities. But it was *Automatic Pilot* that brought her national recognition. Here, the heroine is a would-be stand-up commedienne, and again she is troubled by the men in her life who pull her in various directions, while she tries to cope with her own insecurities and neuroses.

There are many other Toronto playwrights and theatres that could be mentioned because of their contribution to the development of Canadian drama. There are also several out-of-town theatres that have played a strong role in encouraging local interest, in communities such as London, Blyth, Petrolia

and Peterborough, Ontario. Even the Stratford Festival Theatre, long a thorn in the side of cultural nationalists has been lately making an effort to include new works, with plays by Sharon Pollock, Sheldon Rosen, Tom Cone, Larry Fineberg, Steve Petch and others.

A decade has passed since Canadian plays became an established part of the Toronto theatre season. In the intervening years, they have become enormously popular, with many commercial hits. That is a major breakthrough, to be sure. The city no longer has exclusive domination over the new play scene but Toronto remains the headquarters for Canadian drama.

Quebec:

Although comparatively few French-Canadian plays have been translated into English, Quebec theatre has long been a lively part of the cultural scene. The playwrights whose works we have become familiar with in English publications are only a representative sample of a rich and varied theatrical world.

From 1900 through W.W. I and into the 1930s, the drama of French Quebec was very similar to the 'Boulevard' plays of France. The plays were not very original and did not have the strength of intensity to endure. Fortunately, the period between the wars brought a new outlook to the drama of French Quebec, one that can be considered a solid improvement. Authors who liked the theatre, who were familiar with the techniques and requirements of production and who were often quite talented, began to write more plays. The most noted playwright of this period is Gratien Gélinas, best known for *Tit-Coq*, *Yesterday the Children Were Dancing* and *Bousille and the Just*, which are discussed elsewhere in this guide.

The modern plays developed a new social image, emphasizing a new identity that the culture of French Quebec was seeking through the means of drama. Many of these plays which have a social impact are set in a blunt, realistic way. When studying the drama of French Quebec, one must keep in mind that it has been written by and for a cultural minority that had been constantly repressed by a religion and government which did not enable or allow this minority to express its own ways and beliefs. Breaking the barriers of this repression often led to an expression of bitterness and frustration in the new plays.

Perhaps the best known Québécois playwright in English Canada is Michel Tremblay. His plays, many of which have been translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco of the Tarragon Theatre, are discussed in some detail in the preceeding Ontario report. Tremblay's language is often harsh, and his work develops an awareness of the misery, despair, solitude and the inability of some people to surmount the hardships of day-to-day living, particularly those unequipped mentally, physically and emotionally to cope with such problems. And yet, in all Tremblay's works, there is also a humor, slapstick at times, ironic at other times but always useful in alleviating the dead-end lives

of many of his characters. Among Tremblay's many plays are *Hosanna, Forever Yours, Marie-Lou, Les Belles Soeurs* and *En Pièces Détachées.*

Some other writers whose works are available in English translation are Robert Gurik (*The Trial of Jean-Baptiste M., API 2967*), Marcel Dubé (*The White Geese*), Michel Garneau (*Four to Four*), Roland Lepage (*In a Lifetime*), Marie-Claire Blais (*The Execution*), Gaetan Charlebois (*Aléola*) and Claude Roussin (*Looking for a Job*).

On the English-language front, several theatres in Montreal consistently stage Canadian plays, both Anglophone and Québécois works in translation. Centaur Theatre has produced the works of Michel Tremblay, David Fennario and others. The Saidye Bronfman Centre has produced many Canadian plays and has had a long-time association with the Playwrights Workshop of Montreal, a group that has encouraged Anglophone writers since it was founded in 1963. Most scripts that cross the desk of the Workshops' dramaturge come from the province, although they are accepted from across Canada. The dramaturge provides consultation services on all plays submitted and organizes readings and workshops for scripts which have reached a certain level. While the Playwrights Workshop has staged full productions in the past, it is primarily a workshopping organization.

Writers associated with the Playwrights Workshop include David Freeman (now resident in Montreal and author of *Creeps, You're Gonna be Alright Jamie Boy, Battering Ram* and *Damn You, Joey*), George Szanto (*After the Ceremony*), Henry Beissel (*Inook and the Sun, Goya, Under Coyote's Eye*), Aviva Ravel (*Shoulder Pads, The Twisted Loaf, Soft Voices*) and Carol Libman (*Follow the Leader, Wintersong*). Le centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques, the French-language equivalent of the Playwrights Workshop, also has plays in English translation upon request.

English Montreal's brightest light, however, is undoubtedly David Fennario. A socialist with a working-class background, Fennario's first play, *On the Job,* set in the shipping room of a Montreal dress factory, was the surprise hit of Centaur Theatre's 1974/75 season and has since been seen across Canada. He followed this with *Nothing to Lose* (three old friends gather on their lunch hour in a tavern in the Point Saint Charles working class district) and *Balconville* (1979). In the latter, French and English families sharing the tenement housing of Montreal's 'Balconville' live through good times and hard times and together take on the Quebec political establishment in a play that is both hilariously funny and bitingly realistic. In 1980, Fennario was awarded first prize in the Chalmers Canadian Play Awards for a 1979 production of *Balconville,* produced by Centaur Theatre and staged in Toronto at the St. Lawrence Centre for the Performing Arts.

Reving up the summer season outside Montreal is Festival Lennoxville, the creation of former artistic director William Davis. Now in its eighth year,

Lennoxville stages only Canadian plays. Plays at Lennoxville have run the gamut from *Hunting Stuart* by Robertson Davies to *The Great Wave of Civilization* by Herschel Hardin to *The Gayden Chronicles* by Michael Cook.

Atlantic Provinces:

In the early 1970s, indigenous theatre in the Atlantic provinces boiled over into a semi-alternate scene where established, regional companies were offset by a 'Second Stage' at the Neptune Theatre in Halifax, Charlottetown's Lunchtime Theatre, and a 'Young Company' at Theatre New Brunswick in Fredericton.

When most of these folded, due to a reshaping of federal grants, out-of-work aspirants either left the area or resurfaced in the myriad of small companies that have led brief lives ever since. Because of this lack of continuity in the development of a representative local theatre, the regionals have in large part relied on the classics (of both the Shakespearean and the Neil Simon variety) to fill their seasons. This has been a major force against which local playwrights have had to contend.

In recent years, happy to say, more positive signs have been seen for Maritime theatre. Regional playwrights have attained a measure of popularity, both in their own provinces and nationally. The plays of Newfoundland's Michael Cook (*Jacob's Wake, The Gayden Chronicles, Head, Guts and Soundbone Dance*), Al Pittman (*A Rope Against the Sun*) and Tom Cahill (*As Loved Our Fathers*), of the Alden Nowlan and Walter Learning duo in New Brunswick (*The Incredible Murder of Cardinal Tosca, Frankenstein*), of Paul LeDoux (*North Mountain Breakdown, Judy*) and Christopher Heide (*Bring Back Don Messer, Pogie*) in Nova Scotia, prove that the Atlantic provinces can hold their own with drama from elsewhere in the country.

The emergence of a strong Acadian voice (such as seen in *La Sagouine* by Antonine Maillet), of collective groups such as Newfoundland's CodCo, Mummers Troupe and Rising Tide as well as Nova Scotia's Mulgrave Road Co-op add excitement and insight into local issues.

The major playwriting association of the Maritimes is the Dramatists' Co-op of Nova Scotia, a self-governing branch of the Writers' Federation of that province. The Co-op exists to serve, encourage and represent playwrights of Nova Scotia, publishes a catalogue of its members' scripts and also distributes and promotes them. Associated with the organization are Paul LeDoux, Christopher Heide, Peggy Armstrong (*Undercover*) and Arthur L. Murphy (*The Sleeping Bag, Three Bluenose Plays*).

The Prairies:

In Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the rise of an indigenous contemporary prairie drama is closely associated with the rise of professional theatre. Most prairie theatres, large and small, have acknowledged the importance of bringing contemporary Canadian plays to their audiences in recent years; not all, however, have an equal committment to the development of new plays. For the most part it is the low budget companies which provide the creative environment for new playwrights and plays.

In the early 1970s, Alberta Theatre Projects of Calgary was an outstanding example of the small theatre dedicated to the encouragement of the new playwright. For the first four years of its existence (from 1972) ATP, under the artistic directorship of Douglas Riske, produced only Canadian plays, most of these commissions from local writers. Appropriate to the venue in the old log Canmore Opera House in Heritage Park the majority drew on the western Canadian past for their themes.

Writer Paddy Campbell and composer William Skolnik collaborated on musical plays: *Hoarse Muse,* a lively romp about the life and times of newspaperman Bob Edwards of *Eye Opener* fame; *Under the Arch,* an historical satire in music-hall style (evolved from the theatre's opening production, *The History Show*), and more recently, *Passengers* (1977), a contemporary musical drama. Other writers who worked in the first years of ATP on prairie themes include Bonnie Le May with *Roundhouse,* Jan Truss with *A Very Small Rebellion* and Claudia Gibson's *We Don't Need Another Widow McEachen.*

Calgarian John Murrell had two plays premiered at ATP while he was playwright-in-residence between 1975 and 1977: *A Great Noise, A Great Light,* a fictional work about the Aberhart era and *Waiting for the Parade,* the stories of five Calgary women during W.W. II. *Waiting for the Parade* has since been frequently performed at other Canadian theatres and, in 1979, Richard Cottrell directed the play at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London. Another equally popular success for Murrell was his Sarah Bernhardt play *Memoir,* premiered at the Guelph Spring Festival of the Arts in 1977 with Siobhan McKenna in the starring role, a production subsequently taken to Dublin and London. Murrell first attracted the attention of prairie audiences with *Power in the Blood,* the 1975 winner of the Clifford E. Lee Award of the University of Alberta, Edmonton and has also built a reputation as a successful translator of the classics, including Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and *The Seagull,* both staged at the Stratford Festival Theatre.

The Globe Theatre, Regina, is also notable for its support of new writers. Here playwright-in-residence Rex Deverell has achieved his reputation as one of Canada's best playwrights for young people's theatre. His work at the Globe also includes several adult plays: *Boiler Room Suite,* 1977; a comedy *The*

Mark on the Corner of Scarth and 11th, docu-dramas *Number One Hard* and *Medicare*; and *Drift,* premiered in 1980.

The Globe has also commissioned new plays from a variety of other playwrights: Len Peterson's *Queen Street Scrolls* in 1971 (later titled *Women in the Attic*); Carol Bolt's *Next Year Country,* 1972 (later revised at Theatre Passe Muraille as *Buffalo Jump*); Rod Langley's *Tales of a Prairie Drifter,* 1973, a satire of the Riel era and *Bethune,* 1974 (jointly commissioned with Centaur Theatre, Montreal). Ken Mitchell also wrote *The Politician* for ATP in 1977 (later called *Davin: the Politician*), a chronicle of the founder of *The Regina Leader* and volatile M.P. for the Northwest in the post-Riel era. Artistic Director Ken Kramer's latest enterprise to develop new plays at the Globe was a week-long playwrights' workshop in the spring of 1980.

The only other theatre on the prairie that has tried to make a systematic effort to work with playwrights is Northern Light in Edmonton. The formation of the Playwrights Unit in 1977, initially in collaboration with Theatre 3, was intended to offer more writers the opportunity of professional advice in preparation for future production. Among the plays by prairie dramatists given professional workshops and subsequently performed elsewhere were *Stage Falls* by Frank Moher, *The Murder of Auguste Dupin* by Ben Tarver, and *The Mary Shelley Play* by Mary Baldridge.

Northern Light has also produced several full-length prairie plays, including premiers of James de Felice's comedy *Take Me Where the Water's Warm* and Frank Moher's wry Fort MacMurray drama, *Down for the Weekend.*

Theatre 3 in Edmonton has also produced several new scripts over the years: Mary Baldridge's *The Photographic Moment* (1973), Frank Moher's *The Broken Globe* (based on a story by Henry Kreisel, 1976), the Rudy Wiebe-Theatre Passe Muraille collaboration *Far as the Eye Can See* in 1977 and Sharon Pollock's *Blood Relations* in 1980.

Until recently, 25th Street Theatre in Saskatoon, and Theatre Network, Edmonton, have been primarily concerned with collective creations. Under the direction of Andras Tahn, 25th Street has enjoyed successful tours of such regionally oriented shows as *If You're So Good Why Are You in Saskatoon?, Paper Wheat, Prairie Psalms* and *Generation and 1/2* between 1975 and 1978. In 1979, the company produced three new scripted plays, Layne Coleman's *Queen's Cowboy,* Tahn's *Jakob Kepp* and E.H. Carefoot's *Matonabbee.* Theatre Network, under artistic director Mark Manson, also toured three collectives between 1976 and 1978: *Two Miles Off, Hard Hats and Stolen Hearts* (a play about working life at Syncrude) and *Kicker,* a depiction of life in the Northwest Territories. Playwright Gordon Pengilly was associated with the latter two plays. Theatre Nework is also moving to scripted plays, with *Sarah and Gabrial* written and performed by Tanya Ryga and Sharon Stearns in 1979 and plays by Gordon Pengilly and Wilfred Watson scheduled for 1980-81.

The Pengilly work, *The Apprentice of Swipe,* was given a rehearsed reading in 1979 by Workshop West, a new Edmonton theatre devoted to the production of Canadian plays. Coincidentally both Pengilly and Watson have strong associations with the University of Alberta's Studio Theatre. Pengilly's full-length *Songs for Believers* was produced there in 1977, and his earlier one-act plays *Brawler Takes the Count* and *Seeds* were given studio productions at the University. In the 1960s three of Watson's major plays were produced in Studio Theatre seasons: *Cockcrow and the gulls, O holy ghost* and *Let's murder clytemnestra according to the principles of Marshall McLuhan.* His Theatre Network premiere *Gramsci,* written in 1978, is an experimental dramatic study about the death of a memorable Italian Marxist of the Mussolini era.

There are also several established playwrights associated with the region either by birth, residence, or regional themes whose association with the prairie and prairie theatre has been seminal but not exclusive to their development as dramatists. Joanna M. Glass, for example, although born in Saskatoon, began writing plays after she emigrated to the United States. However much of her work, *Canadian Gothic,* 1972; *Artichoke,* 1975 and *The Last Chalice,* 1977, reflects her early background. *The Last Chalice* was written for the Manitoba Theatre Centre's 20th anniversary, one of the rare commissions of new work in recent years from the prairie's oldest regional theatre.

W.O. Mitchell has adapted several plays from radio and television for the stage: *Back to Beulah,* premiered by Theatre Calgary in 1975; *The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon* for Ontario's Peterborough Festival (1977) and *The Devil's Instrument* (Peterborough, 1972). An adaptation of his novel *The Kite* is announced by Theatre Calgary for spring 1981.

Ken Mitchell of Regina had his first major stage success with the Persephone Theatre's opening production of *Cruel Tears* in 1975, a prairie version of the Othello story written in collaboration with musicians Humphrey and the Dumptrucks. Mitchell's well-known short play *This Train* premiered at Tarragon Theatre, Toronto, 1973; the earlier *Heroes,* in the U.S., 1971. Another prairie play, *The Shipbuilder,* was performed at the University of Regina in 1978. Mitchell's most recent premiere is his China play, *The Great Cultural Revolution,* staged at the Arts Club Theatre, Vancouver, 1979.

Sharon Pollock's first play, *Walsh,* was produced by Harold Baldridge at Theatre Calgary in 1973; during residence in Vancouver she wrote *Out Goes You* and *The Komagata Maru Incident,* performed at the Vancouver Playhouse in 1975 and 1976 respectively. She returned to Alberta for a year and subsequently became playwright-in-residence at Alberta Theatre Projects until 1979. Her *Compulsory Option* was performed at the Citadel second stage, Edmonton, in 1975 and *One Tiger to a Hill,* inspired by the New Westminster hostage-taking incident in 1975 premiered at the Citadel's Shoctor Theatre in 1980. Another new work, *Generations,* premieried at ATP in the fall of 1980.

As prairie theatre grows in assurance, so does the drama it is helping to originate. The work of the theatres and writers alike also reflects alertness to the developing Canadian drama at large. The encouragement of new plays from other regions, as at the Globe Theatre, is one indication. The suitability of prairie plays for production elsewhere is another, such as work by John Murrell, Rex Deverell, Joanna M. Glass, W.O. Mitchell, Sharon Pollock and Ken Mitchell. The prairie subject itself is important but not exclusive to these writers. Regional self-consciousness has been of some consequence in the initiating of indigenous theatre and drama on the prairie, but not as an end itself. Consequently, prairie theatre and drama is becoming an important tributary of the national theatrical mainstream.

The West Coast:

Vancouver may be isolated from the rest of Canada by the Rocky Mountains but that hasn't stopped its writers from making their voices heard from coast to coast. Since the late 1960s, when a vociferous group that included George Ryga, Herschel Hardin, Beverley Simons and Sharon Pollock rallied for the production of Canadian plays in Canadian theatres, Vancouver playwrights have influenced the indigenous theatre movement in this country. Since that time Sheldon Rosen, Tom Cone, Margaret Hollingsworth, Betty Lambert, Joe Wiesenfeld, Rod Langley, Leonard Angel, John Lazarus, Dennis Foon, Sherman Snukal, Christian Bruyere, Gwen Pharis Ringwood, Eric Nicol, Tom Walmsley, Jeremy Long and others have joined the roster. For a medium-sized city, Vancouver is a beehive of playwrights.

The West Coast playwriting movement took off in 1967 with the first production of one of Canada's most important plays, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, at the Playhouse Theatre Centre. Written by George Ryga, an ex-Albertan born in 1932 of Ukranian descent, this was one of the first full-length Canadian plays to achieve popular success and is now regarded as a classic in its own right.

With its hard-hitting social message, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* traces the tragic story of an Indian girl who leaves the reservation and cannot survive the onslaught of 'civilization' in the city of Vancouver. Degraded in the streets, condemned in the courts, Rita Joe's present life is contrasted in a series of flashbacks and fantasy scenes with the happy days of her childhood. Her death at the hands of drunken rapists, Ryga makes clear, is the responsibility of white society.

Many plays which make a strong social statement have been written by West Coast authors. Another member of the early group was Beverley Simons whose plays *Crabdance* and *Preparing* were early examples of feminist works. *Crabdance*, a tragi-comedy, was first staged in Seattle, Washington in 1969 when Simons could not get a Canadian production (a typical situation here

and elsewhere in Canada). *Crabdance* explores the feelings of a middleaged woman about herself, her sexual relationships with men and her attitude to motherhood. Simons' shorter play, *Preparing*, is a monologue which also deals with a woman's life from adolescence to old age, ending with her defiant rejection of the demands of her grandchildren.

Another important play from this period is *Esker Mike and His Wife, Agiluk*, written by Herschel Hardin in 1967. It was first published in New York in *The Drama Review* but Canadian theatres ignored it until Toronto's Factory Theatre Lab staged it in 1971. Written in a series of scenes and using a very simple and pure dialogue, Hardin's tragedy of the Eskimo mother, Agiluk, is as dramatic and moving as that of Rita Joe's.

Typically, *The Great Wave of Civilization*, also written by Hardin, did not receive its first production until the summer of 1976 at Festival Lennoxville (in Quebec) although it was written in 1962.

Until the early '70s, these playwrights formed a powerful group which forced the rest of English-speaking Canada to recognize the West's contributions to Canadian theatre. Today East and West are strongly aware of each other, with plays and playwrights travelling in both directions. The struggle to open up the country has taken its toll, however, on all but Sharon Pollock ... George Ryga now writes mainly for radio and television, Herschel Hardin has ceased writing plays altogether and Beverley Simons has not offered the public a new play since 1976.

Because of the liveliness of the playwriting scene, Vancouver was a fertile birthplace for the New Play Centre, an organization devoted entirely to the development of new Canadian plays. Since 1972, the New Play Centre has stressed a step-by-step process of play development. Writers (who must be B.C. residents) submit first drafts, then revise their plays based on one-to-one discussions with directors. Readings before invited audiences of directors, actors and critics follow if the work seems to have merit.

More rewriting usually takes place, or, as has happened in several cases, the author may decide not to continue with the script if the audience response has not been favorable. A small scale workshop may follow and for a one-act or full-length play there is a possibility of a full-scale production. The Centre also has a Spring Festival of one-act plays and once or twice a year co-produces a new play with the Vancouver Playhouse, Tamahnous, West Coast Actors or one of the city's other professional theatres.

Plays which the New Play Centre has helped to develop include *Walsh* and *The Komagata Maru Incident* by Sharon Pollock, *Bethune* by Rod Langley, *Sqrieux-de-Deux* by Betty Lambert, *Herringbone* by Tom Cone, *Mother Country* by Margaret Hollingsworth and *Ned and Jack* by Sheldon Rosen.

Walsh, The Komagata Maru Incident and *Bethune* all deal with Canadian historical figures or incidents. *Walsh*, written by Sharon Pollock (who was

born in New Brunswick, lived in B.C. for many years and now resides in Alberta) is set in the 19th century and deals with Sitting Bull's exile in Canada after the Montana Massacre at Little Big Horn. It was first performed at Theatre Calgary in 1973. Another Pollock play, *The Komagata Maru Incident*, looks at the tragedy of racism through an actual historical incident. Commissioned by the Vancouver Playhouse, it was first produced in 1975 with subsequent productions in Edmonton and Toronto.

Bethune, by Rod Langley, is the story of Norman Bethune, the medical doctor from Montreal who became a revered hero in China. Like Riel and the Black Donnelly's of Ontario, Bethune is something of a cultural icon for Canadian dramatists. After being workshopped by the New Play Centre, *Bethune* was staged in Regina, Montreal, Edmonton and elsewhere.

Two other playwrights developing substantial reputations are ironically enough both of American origin. Tom Cone, an active organizer on the city scene was born in Miami in 1947 and raised in Southeastern USA. He has lived and worked in Canada since 1970. His produced plays include *Cubistique*, *Herringbone* and an adaptation of Goldoni's *Servant of Two Masters* staged at both the Stratford Festival Theatre and the Vancouver Playhouse in 1980.

Sheldon Rosen writes frequently in the comic vein although his newest and best-received script *Ned and Jack* blends humor with a realistic poignancy in the story of the friendship between the famous actor John Barrymore ('Jack') and playwright Edward Sheldon ('Ned'). Now living in Toronto and preparing the play for its Broadway debut, Rosen has also written *The Box*, *Stag King*, *Love Mouse* and *Meyer's Room*.

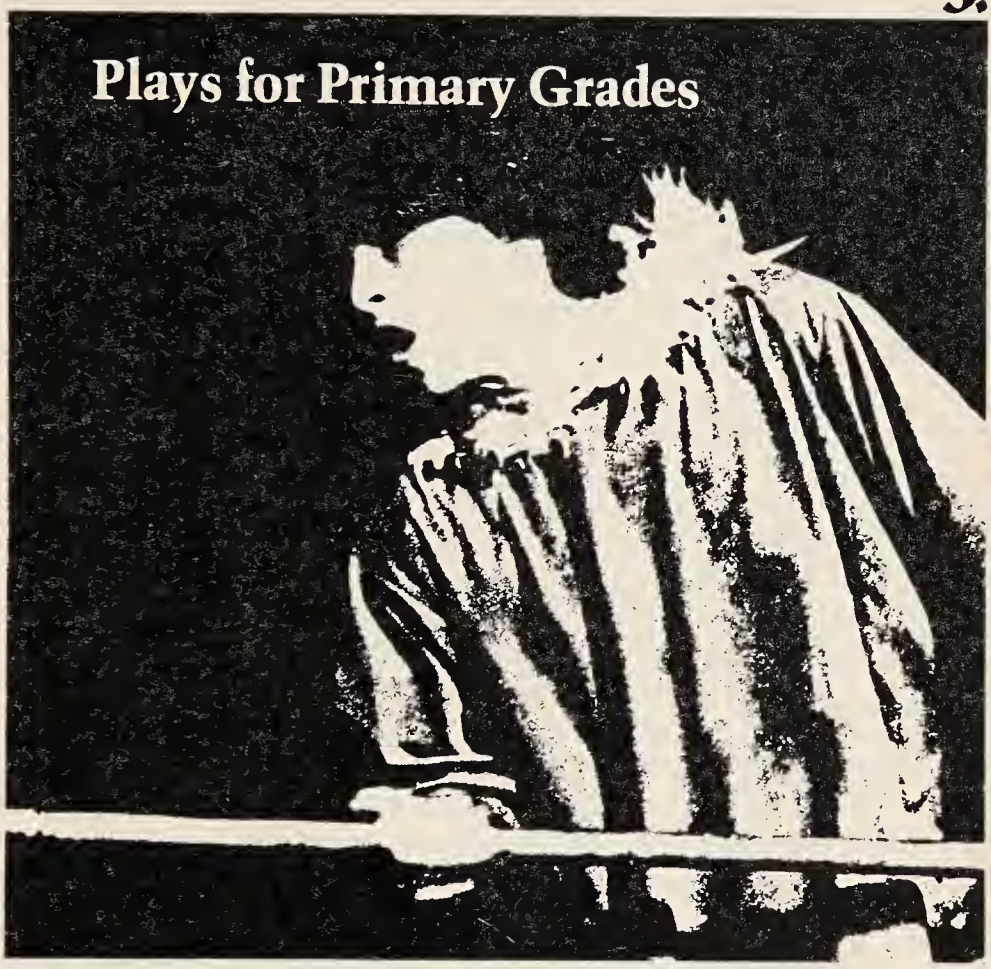
For a city of its size, Vancouver has produced many memorable plays. One of the most-often seen is *Billy Bishop Goes To War*, a musical collaboration between John Gray, composer and playwright, and actor Eric Petersen. First staged in 1978 by the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, it has since been seen across Canada, in New York, Los Angeles and at the Edinborough Festival in the summer of 1980. In addition, the hard-hitting, graphic plays of Tom Walmsley (*Something Red*, *The Jones Boy*), Campbell Smith's outspoken portrayal of teen-age life, *Juve*, and Eric Nicol's comedy *Free To Last* are well worth noting.

The number of theatres available to stage Canadian plays in Vancouver has mushroomed since 1970 with the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, Tamahnous Theatre, West Coast Actors, the Arts Club Theatre, City Stage and others joining the Playhouse during this past decade. No longer can it be said that our only theatre centre is Toronto. Vancouver, once an up-and-comer, is now decidedly a centre in its own right.

Prepared by David McCaughna (Ontario), Diane Bessai (Prairies), Connie Brissenden.

3.

Plays for Primary Grades



Introduction:

Teachers are often searching for plays to use in their classroom teaching or for school concerts and assemblies. Until about ten years ago, answering that demand with Canadian material was not easy, but today, one can confidently recommend any one of several dozen scripts.

The most important reason for the steady increase in published plays for young people is undoubtedly the phenomenal growth of professional theatre companies performing for the young. In the 1950s, only Vancouver's Holiday Theatre performed regularly for young people. In the 1960s, the Manitoba Theatre Centre, Theatre Hour Company in Ontario and Les Jeunes Comediéns of Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in Quebec were founded and each considered performances for young audiences an important part of their mandate. Some new scripts were written for these pioneer companies but more often they performed pieces from the classical repertoire or used published plays based on fairy tales and legends by U.S., French or British authors. In the 1970s, however, many new Canadian plays were produced and published. Playwrights Co-op (Toronto), now known as Playwrights Canada, Talonbooks

(Vancouver) and Simon & Pierre (Toronto) all have included plays for children in their publication lists. It is to call attention to these useful scripts that this chapter has been conceived.

Plays listed here have two wonderful attributes. Each has been professionally produced and each was written by a contemporary Canadian playwright. The theatre is the most immediate of all the arts and inevitably reflects the time in which it was written. These plays, whatever their style or plot content, say something to us about ourselves today. Some of the plays are based on historical fact. Bonnie LeMay's *Boy Who Has a Horse,* Dennis Foon's *Raft Baby* and Jan Truss's *The Judgement of Clifford Sifton* help us to better understand the terrible trial of the Indians when their way of life had to change, the luck and the loneliness of a wilderness explorer and the isolation and terrors of the pioneer immigrants to Canada. Other plays retell old legends. Paddy Campbell's *Chinook,* Dennis Foon's *Heracles* and Henry Beissel's *Inook and the Sun* retell respectively an Indian explanation of a natural mystery, the agony of a Greek hero and an Inuit boy's difficult journey to maturity. Many plays are set in modern times. Rex Deverell's *Sarah's Play,* Carol Bolt's *My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High* and Betty Jane Wylie's *Kingsayer* all deal with peer pressures and meaningful friendships. A teacher has only to read the descriptions in this chapter to find at least one play exactly right for his or her class to enjoy.

Contemporary Canadian plays for young people have many uses but may take some getting used to. They were written to be performed as well as read and may seem skeletal and strange to a person accustomed to reading short stories and novels. However, once one learns to 'see' the action described in the stage directions in one's head, reading plays can become addictive. It is even better to try them out on their feet – to bring them from the page to the stage. The resources of the professional companies for whom these plays were written were often meagre; the solutions the designers and directors devised to solve technical problems of scenery and lighting were, therefore, imaginative and ingenious. Many of these are carefully described in the texts. Practical knowledge of the theatre is an inevitable fringe benefit for any class that studies and produces one of these plays. Another way that a teacher can use these plays is as a prototype and inspiration for the children to create their own plays. James Reaney's plays, *Apple Butter, Names and Nicknames, Geography Match* and *Ignoramus* are like that. Worth reading as literature silently, they are also fun to read aloud; they could be produced in a school and the form and content are rich enough to engender other original works.

Putting on a play takes a lot of time and energy but it is a wonderful way to provide a variety of tasks attractive to many diverse interests and talents. Sounds must be created, live or taped. Costumes must be designed or found. Scenery must be designed, built, painted or done away with altogether (as in

Rex Deverell's plays for Regina's Globe Theatre and on tour – here only a few 'props' and the imagination of the audience are needed to create the scene). All the above jobs and more, in addition to the actors, are needed to produce a play. The *esprit de corps* of a cast and crew in rehearsal and performance is one of the big reasons why being a part of a theatrical event is so memorable for anyone who has ever done it.

So, whether you need a play to illustrate an incident in history, a play to examine social issues, a play as a springboard to a creative writing assignment or a play to perform – you should be able to find one listed here. Shakespeare said that the job of the theatre was 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature'; when the play is contemporary and Canadian, the reflection is our very own.

Joyce Doolittle

Selected Reading:

Tangleflags (Carol Bolt)

A delightful quartet of characters, a girl, a dog, a Japanese lady and a Czechoslovakian man, attempt to choose a name for their town which is acceptable to all. They wrestle with the problem of having no name and with the greater problem of relinquishing personal bias in the interest of coming up with the ideal solution. All arguments and fighting cease when, as a result of a happy accident, a suitable and agreeable name presents itself.

Many city schools wrestle daily with the problem of prejudices which have their basis in cultural differences. Thus social studies and language arts programs include themes and ideas which encourage confrontation of such topics and which lead to tolerance and understanding. *Tangleflags* is an ideal supplement to such programs and would be an excellent play for secondary students to tour to feeder schools. One Act. (PLA)

Activities:

1. Discover the 'roots' of the students within your classroom, and encourage sharing of information and artifacts which may be gleaned from home, local cultural groups and with the aid of the school librarian.
2. Research heraldry and paint large flags of the representative countries of origin. A collage of these flags surrounding a Canadian flag would create an ideal backdrop for a multicultural show. Folk tales, national dances, folk songs could be selected and performed to build an interesting show for children and parents.
3. Develop a class multicultural recipe book with each child contributing a recipe. Some of the children will undoubtedly bring along samples of their cooking. Grandmothers are usually delighted to assist them. Illustrations for this book could also be prepared.
4. Encourage each student to research a folk tale and become familiar enough with it so that the story can be told (not read) or acted out for younger students or their peers. Some children may prefer working with poetry.

5. Using Brownie's sensitive hearing as the stepping off point, develop scenes (in groups of three or four) which show Brownie's reactions to an argument. Following experimentation with the idea and with various roles, encourage each group to orchestrate an argument which is interesting to watch and listen to.

Ready Steady Go (Sandra Jones)
Pack rats invade a dusty old attic and threaten to disrupt and destroy the quiet and ordered lives of the toys who live there. The toys' protector, Ready Steady, temporarily disabled by the invaders, is stripped of his Mounties' uniform which the rats believe is the source of his authority. Suffering a loss of faith in his capacity as protector of his friends, Ready Steady is finally enabled to re-establish law and order through their co-operation and support. The evil rats are captured and the community of toys, closer and happier than ever before, enjoy a celebratory party.

This play has many pluses from the point of view of the classroom teacher. An interesting variety of characters, a clear conflict between good and evil and plenty of action will ensure enthusiastic participation through discussion and allied drama activities. One Act. (PLA)

Activities:

1. Provide outlines of scenes or action from or based on the play and distribute to groups of from 3 to 5 students so that they may explore and share their interpretations with each other. Each group may prepare a different scene or all students may explore the same scene.

a. Vanilla, Sasparilla, Laevinia and Marie have a tea party. Who and what do they talk about? How could your scene end in an interesting way? (Note: The teacher could provide a copy of the words of the song 'Vanilla, Sasparilla, Laevinia and Marie Have Plenty to Talk About Whenever They Drink Tea,' as a stimulus for action. See p. 12.)

b. The packrats arrive with wonderful presents for the dolls. Show how they manage to get the dolls in their power. In the play the rats bring chocolates, perfume, long gloves and gold coins. You may choose other gifts.

c. Scrumptious, the bear, arrives to tell Ready Steady and Ramona, the horse, about the pack rat invasion. Scrumptious is afraid to go back and face the enemy. Show how Ready Steady and Ramona feel. How does this scene end? (Note: If it is decided that all students will explore the same scene, you may have a group read the scene previous to commencement of the activity. The scene begins with Scrumptious' entrance on the bottom of p. 21 and ends on p. 23 with the exit of Ready Steady and Ramona.)

2. Discuss Ramona's birthday dream with the students (pp. 4 and 5). Ramona dreams of a wonderful birthday party with friends, presents and a cake. In groups of two, tell your students to choose another animal and plan a party

that it might like. (Note: With the assistance of the students develop a list of animals to aid in their selection. Culminate the activity by permitting one pair to share their ideas with another pair.)

3. The play contains several lovely songs which would make an excellent offering for the school assembly. 'Vanilla, Sasparilla, Laevinia and Marie Have Plenty to Talk About Whenever They Drink Tea' could be staged as a most entertaining choric drama. The parts are already clearly assigned for choir and actors. 'Ready Steady Go' is in the form of a cheer. The students would enjoy devising suitable actions for this. 'McClot, McClutter, McClump' could be prepared as a choric drama. Rat masks constructed from paper and a rat dance would guarantee a lively and memorable event.

Inook and the Sun (Henry Beissel)

Inook, a young Eskimo lad, embarks upon a great hunt. His people are starving and in order to save them from death he plans to capture the sun and bring it back to his land so that the game will return and his people's survival will be ensured.

His quest, begun in the company of his father, eventually becomes a lonely one when his father and their dog team are killed by a bear. Powerful spirits and creatures of sea, air and land either try to aid his pursuit or prevent him from realizing his goal. Inook learns from every experience and finally his persistence and courage are rewarded with success. The boy becomes a man. The sun becomes his bride and they set off for Aivilik.

Conceived as a vehicle for Bunraku puppets and not primarily written for children, *Inook and the Sun* happens to be an excellent play and magnificent theatre. The language is poetic and hence the images have an immediate impact. Upper elementary students, and even an average grade four class, should have no problem with the vocabulary which is brilliantly simple.

The play consists of a prologue, ten episodes and an epilogue. Any of these parts, which are complete in themselves, could be plucked and explored in a variety of ways. Two Acts. (PLA)

Activities:

1. Children thoroughly enjoy working with shadow puppets. Many episodes in this play lend themselves to this art. Episode 4 (pp. 30-31) is conceived as a shadow play. Inook, the Spirit of the Dream, a sea monster, a whale, a shark, wild geese, all participate in this vivid and colorful scene. Break the class into groups of 3 or 4 and give them the same scene to prepare. They would become aware of the fact that plays can be interpreted successfully in many ways.

2. Dividing the class into groups of five or six (two or three musicians plus the characters of Inook, Father and Mother), allow time for exchange of roles and functions so that they may explore various ways in which this ritual

drama may be communicated through mime and movement. Circulate among groups providing assistance or guidance as necessary. If the class is inexperienced and in need of the security of a model, the teacher may devise a similar experience providing rhythmic accompaniment with one or two instruments. (Note: Rhythm band instruments or 'found' instruments work equally well.)

3. Episode 3 (pp. 25-29) lends itself to an exploration of radio drama. Any number of excellent examples of this form are available on record or tape from your local library or radio stations. Next develop a radio script with the assistance of the children using the first few lines of Episode 3 (p. 25).

e.g. 'Arctic winter. Arctic night. There is no moon ... the wind is howling. We hear the barking dog team before it whisks the sled with Inook and his Father into sight.'

Ask your students: What sounds do we need? How can we make them sound real? If a narrator were speaking these lines on radio and we wanted to use sounds to bring the scene to life, what would be a good way to do it? Remember the words and the sounds are both important.

Following a discussion, ask for volunteers to implement the student suggestions. Those listening to the 'radio' show close their eyes and gauge the effectiveness of what they hear. Encourage constructive criticisms.

Once the students have grasped the idea, divide them into groups and let them prepare this complete episode. They will finish the task at different times which permits a teacher to assist them in taping their work so that they can hear the results of their efforts. (Usually, *all* sound great, especially to the creators!)

4. Provide a character list. Ask the children to choose one or two characters and design costumes for them. Be sure to mount a costume design display.

Names and Nicknames (James Reaney)

Old Grandpa Thorntree takes an evil delight in providing nicknames for the inhabitants of a small farming community. Families have babies and give them beautiful names which are quickly distorted and spoiled by this singularly spiteful old man. Finally, the people plan a perfect revenge. They give a baby so many names that it is impossible for Thorntree to dream up nicknames for them all. Their plan is so successful that a miracle occurs and the villain is changed into a dry old thorn tree. The people rejoice as it is now safe for them to marry and have children who will be able to enjoy proper names.

The author describes *Names and Nicknames* as being 'a theatre of play.' Sounds, songs, children's games and rhymes and words, words and more words combine to produce a fantastically imaginative and joyful theatre event. One Act. (TAL)

Activities:

1. Plan a production using teachers and students; or
2. Plan a production using a cast comprised of high school and elementary students; or
3. Plan a production in cooperation with the University Theatre Arts or Drama Department. Most universities offer courses in children's creative or developmental drama and these activities are necessary for the successful realization of this script.
4. Since mime is basic to much of the action, introduce it to your students. Obtain a copy of *Mime and Masks* by Roberta Nobleman, New Plays Books, Toolley Place, Royayton, Connecticut, 1979, approx. $7.95. This useful little book contains all a person needs to know and more.
5. There are so many short scenes in this play which would serve to provide a 'feel' for the play as a whole. Select one and prepare it to share with another class.
6. In the final scene of the play the people are planning a celebration for the community. They decide what they want to eat and arrange the words into a chant. Once the students are familiar with this idea, let them develop their own chants and create movements to go along with them:

A Very Small Rebellion (Jan Truss)

Surveyors arrive in Western Canada and the Indians learn that their land is to be sold to the Government. Louis Riel, a Metis, speaking on behalf of the Indians and Metis asks that the native inhabitants be guaranteed certain rights of language, religion, land and government. When the Lieutenant-Governor arrives to claim the land for the Queen of England, Riel and a handful of men scare him off. Realizing that this action may have serious repercussions, Riel gathers together a small army. Eventually, Riel is forced to flee for his life when he learns that an army is being sent to get him. Persuaded to return, Riel is finally captured and hanged.

There are many fine Canadian plays which deal with historical events and *A Very Small Rebellion* is one of these. Children have a natural sense of fair play and thus very quickly understand the injustices which they see being brought to life before them. The play stimulates an immediate flow of extremely thoughtful discussion. One Act. (PLA)

Activities:

1. There are many sound effect records available for loan or purchase. Create a sound tape which would be suitable for the first scene of this play. After the children have listened to it a few times, divide them into groups so that they may explore ways to create the desired effects through their own use of voice and 'found' sounds. Tape them so that they have a chance to gauge the effectiveness of their experiments.

2. Buy a large piece of white cheese cloth to create the effect of a snow-covered landscape. (It will always come in handy for your Christmas concert.) Solicit student suggestions for creating the effect of a river, a sunrise, summer, rain, etc.
3. The Indians in the play communicate with each other by means of imitating the sounds of birds and animals. Introduce this idea just prior to recess. Ask the children to work with a friend and find a suitable realistic communication which strangers might believe was the sound of an animal or a bird. Begin your next physical education period out of doors so that the students can hear all the sounds they have invented.
4. Read F. Pauline Johnson's poem, 'The Cattle Thief' and discuss and compare the ideas in the poem with those in the play.

The Underground Lake (Rex Deverell)
Mr. Typhoon, a bigoted oil executive is being driven to Oil City by Tiffin, a substitute chauffeur. The day is blazing hot and dry and Tiffin insists upon stopping for a drink of water at a rusty old pump. Typhoon, noticing the presence of children, reveals his dislike of them and Tiffin undertakes to teach him a lesson by way of the story of *The Underground Lake.* While playing the role of Toofine the Millionaire, Typhoon is introduced to the Undergrounders and Overgrounders. These two different people, due to their scant knowledge of one another, have assumed and propagated unreasonable and unfounded prejudices. Mutual need of water eventually leads to confrontation. Both groups finally discover that they have more similarities than differences and that there is more to gain by sharing the water supply than by monopolizing it. Prejudice dissolves into enlightenment.

The Underground Lake, written for level 1 or K-3 students, is an excellent vehicle for secondary students to prepare for touring to elementary schools. Although the play originally toured Saskatchewan and played to lower elementary classes, it certainly has enough substance to hold the interest and spark the imagination of level 2 students. (Grades 4 to 6). One Act. (PLA)
Activities:
1. In the first scene of the play a car is required. Since it is impossible to provide the real thing how would you create a pretend car to serve the purpose of a real one? Small groups of children seek and share solutions to the problem.
2. Improvise the following scenes in small groups of four or five:
a. People who have always lived inside a protective bubble prepare to venture outside. They share their knowledge of the 'outsiders.' What do they hope for? What do they fear? What happens when they finally take that step and move outside?

b. A new family have moved into the house next door. The family who moved away were close friends of yours and these new people are quite different. You feel badly that your friends have gone away and at first you really dislike the newcomers. Show how you meet and make friends.

3. *Tableaux Vivants* – Groups of students create a sequence of 3 pictures which communicate the following: (see p. 23 of *Three Plays by Rex Deverell*)

a. preparing for the explosion;
b. the explosion;
c. after the explosion.

4. Children select a favorite character and paint or draw a portrait which is shared with others through discussion and display. A good follow up would be to introduce the wonderful portraits of O.M. Grandmaison.

Additional Plays (suitable for reading, seeing and/or performing by children):

My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High (Carol Bolt)
Five children learn why each member of their group is important and necessary. One Act. (PLA)

The Bleeding Heart of Wee Jon (John G. Campbell)
To win the hand of a lovely girl, Wee Jon faces a series of daring trials which include the capture and taming of a wild dragon. One Act. (PLA)

Too Many Kings (Paddy Campbell)
Mendel, the Master Story-Maker, welcomes the audience to his Story Factory and tells a tale that brings forth far too many bickering Kings. One Act. (PLA)

The Copetown City Kite Crisis (Rex Deverell)
A small town must choose between prosperity or pollution. Audience participates as workers at the factory. One Act. (PLA)

Sarah's Play (Rex Deverell)
Ivan's wondrous computor offers to make all Sarah's wishes come true, but Sarah still has trouble making friends. One Act. (PLA)

Raft Baby (Dennis Foon)
Blackfoot Jean, a trapper, finds a baby but gives it away. Humorous and touching story about family loss and attachment. Lesson plans available from publisher. One Act. Grades 4-9. (TAL)

The Windigo (Dennis Foon)
An Ojibway hunter's confrontation with hunger and the ice spirit. Lesson plans available from publisher. One Act. (TAL)

The Bling Said Hello (Georgette Guay)
The Bling, a strange creature from outer space, lands in an isolated northern Ontario community. One Act. (PLA)

You'll Never be the Same (Georgette Guay)
The Bling helps Sandy, an adolescent, come to terms with her desire to be an individual. One Act. (PLA)

Blunderkin and the Reality Machine (Sandra Jones)
A colony of bats are challenged by mysterious humans who can distort thought. One Act. (PLA)

Boy Who Has A Horse (Bonnie Le May)
A Sioux youth must decide whether to surrender with his people or try to find a better life for himself alone. One Act. (PLA)

Beware the Quickly Who (Eric Nicol)
A boy sets out in search of his identity. One Act. Grade 4-6. (PLA)

The Clam Made a Face (Eric Nicol)
Participation play based on the culture of the West Coast Indians. Stories are from Indian legends. One Act. (S&P)

Billy Bishop and the Red Baron (Len Peterson)
Children in a hospital ward learn about the flying aces of World War I and re-enact events. One Act. (S&P)

Ignoramus (James Reaney)
A debate between Dr. Hilda History and Dr. Charles Progressaurus over traditional and progressive forms of education. Contests in History, French, Latin, Grammar, Mathematics, Chemistry and Poetry. The adjudicator – the Governor-General. One Act. (TAL)

Geography Match (James Reaney)
The Academy Kids vs. the Continuation School Kids in a cross-Canada geography match – Mr. Wolfwind, Miss Weathergood, the Iceberg Lady, the Nun, Bonhomme de Neige, Tecumseh, etc. One Act. (TAL)

The Sleeping Beauty (Gwen Pharis Ringwood)
Based on the fairytale but adapted to an Indian setting. Uses masks, dance, and original songs. Intended for performance *by* youngsters. One Act. (PLA)

The Magic Carpets of Antonio Angelini (Gwen Pharis Ringwood)
Thor fails in his effort to rob Maria, Samothracia the donkey and Antonio the rug dealer. Instead he learns the story behind each carpet. Onc Act. (PLA)

A Princess Never Should (Lib Spry)
A fairy tale about a cruel king and how his rebellious daughter forces him to change is ways. Humorous with imaginative characters. Full length. (PLA)

The Judgement of Clifford Sifton (Jan Truss)
How the imaginative policies of politician Clifford Sifton affected the settling of the West. Particularly lends itself to reading. Full length. (PLA)

Ooomerahgi Oh (Jan Truss)
The story of a family who get involved with a wandering stranger and his magic box. One Act. (PLA)

A Chain of Words (Irene N. Watts)
Japanese folk tales with a universal appeal. Lesson plans available from publisher. One Act. (TAL)

Martha's Magic (Irene N. Watts)
An old woman is determined to live in the forest and shun civilization. Her adventures include confrontations with employees of a timber mill, the firebird, and a bank robber. Grades 1-4. One Act. (PLA)

The Old Woman and the Pedlar (Betty Jane Wylie)
Concerned citizens help an old woman find her lost identity. Uses songs and nursery rhymes. One Act. (PLA)

Kingsayer (Betty Jane Wylie)
Uses games, songs and sayings to create a world of childhood. One Act. (PLA)

Pickles and Puppets (Noreen Young and Juli Voyer)
A musical following the exploits of Henry and P.J. Pickles who arrive in the dour town of Squelch where laughter has been outlawed. The two puppeteers assist in lifting the gloom. Two Acts. (PLA)

Land of Magic Spell (Larry Zacharko)
Prospector Bill searches for the Mountain Man's lost alphabet letters in return for the promise of one wish. Children 7-10. One Act. (S&P)

Maxmilian Beetle (Larry Zacharko)
The cast of this musical is made up of insects and a few humans. One Act. (PLA)

Additional Resources:

Canadian Children's Drama and Theatre, Vol. 8 & 9, 1977.
A special issue devoted to criticism and reviews from the Canadian Children's Literature Association, Box 335, Guelph, Ontario N1H 6K5.

Curriculum Comments (Lorna Mackay).
Teacher's aid to Vol. 4 of the series *A Collection of Canadian Plays* (S&P). Includes a synopsis of each play in Vol. 4, assessments of themes, style, characterization, etc. as well as suggestions for discussion and study. Ten plays are surveyed including *Land of Magic Spell, The Clam Make a Face, Cyclone Jack, Billy Bishop and the Red Baron.* (S&P)

Kids Plays: Six Canadian Plays for Children.
Includes *My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High, Chinook, Copetown City Kite Crisis, The Bling Said Hello, Beware the Quickly Who, The Magic Carpets of Antonio Angelini.* (PLA)

A Mirror of Our Dreams: Children and the Theatre in Canada
(Joyce Doolittle and Zina Barnieh). With a chapter on theatre in Quebec by Hélène Beauchamp. (TAL)

A Teacher's Guide to Theatre for the Young (Jane Howard, ed.).
Study guide to eight Canadian plays for children including *Geography Match, Ignoramus, Names and Nicknames, Raft Baby, Windigo, A Chain of Words.* (TAL)

4.

Plays for Performance

Introduction:

Many of the plays in this book, discussed in other chapters, are accessible to students for performance, scene work, or introduction to theatre as performance, as well as for study under the various headings. However, in this chapter, we will deal with the scripts primarily as plays to be performed, either in their entirety or in individual scenes, or as examples of monologues which could be of value in a drama class. They have been classified in terms of style, content and length, with brief descriptions and some suggestions as to how they could be used.

Allegory:

Babel Rap (John Lazarus)

One Act; 2m (or could be 2f or 1m, 1f). Two carpenters at work on the Tower of Babel find themselves at odds with each other regarding the holy nature of their work. Differences of opinion become full scale arguments which lead to the scarily hilarious intervention of a 'Third Party'. (PLA)

Heroes (Ken Mitchell)
One Act; 3m, 1f. A black comedy in which Superman, the Lone Ranger, Lois Lane and Tonto meet in a struggle for power in the office of 'the Chief'. (PLA)

Burlap Bags (Len Peterson)
One Act; 10m or f. The re-enactment of a suicide's diary, describing the process in which life has become painfully absurd to him. While most people exist with burlap bags over their heads, he is forced to see clearly all the anomalies of modern life. A challenging and imaginative exercise for students. (PLA)

Love Mouse (Sheldon Rosen)
One Act; 2m, 1f. A whimsical farce following the adventures of a married couple whose dining-room floor becomes a major body of water. They find themselves swept away, accompanied only by a mouse which becomes a wolf, which becomes an insurance salesman. In the process, they become reacquainted with each other. (PLA)

Big X, Little Y (Elinore Siminovitch)
One Act; 4m, 4f. Women and their roles as seen through nursery rhymes, songs, dance, games and typical situations: love, marriage, childbirth, child-rearing, war, discrimination in politics and employment. Lends itself to interesting staging. (PLA)

Electric Gunfighter (Bryan Wade)
One Act; 2m. Two men watching a TV set act out the rituals commonly projected on the screen. The gap between reality and myth, as peddled on television, is explored. (PLA)

He Didn't Even Say Good-bye (Norman Williams)
One Act; 4m, 1f. Ben has inadvertently found a way to deal with people who disturb him ... they simply vanish! Others see them and hear them, but Ben doesn't, even those he loves. When his son rejects him, he loses his last touch with reality. His struggle ends, he succumbs to silence and a kind of peace. (PLA)

Canada's Native People:

Inook and the Sun (Henry Beissel)
Full length; 12 marionettes, 8 masks (or equivalent people). This is a mythological 90-minute play which can be produced with marionettes, masks and/or actors. An Inuit boy whose father is killed by a polar bear in winter searches for the sun and must endure many trials before liberating it

from its prison in an iceberg. A challenging and interesting play which lends itself to experimentation with masks, marionettes, etc. (PLA)

Twin Sinks of Allan Sammy (Cam Hubert)
One Act; 3m, 3f. The struggle of an Indian couple who have given up their life on the reserve to try to make it in the city, is resolved when they finally decide to return to the reserve. An imaginative and revealing play that would be interesting to perform and could provoke wide-reaching discussion. (PLA)

Lament for a Harmonica (Gwen Pharis Ringwood)
One Act; 2m, 5f. Maya, an Indian girl who has had a child by a white man, kills her Indian lover to save the child's father. (DELL)

Indian (George Ryga)
One Act; 3m. A powerful drama about an Indian laborer, alternately patronized and victimized by white authorities. He understands his situation but is powerless to fight it on white man's terms. Excellent for student work. (GAGE)

Comedy:

Was She Sown Or Was She Reaped? (John G. Campbell)
One Act; 2m, 4f. A Victorian melodrama complete with wicked squire, weedy hero, winsome widow and willing daughters. (PLA)

The Up-Hill Revival (Rex Deverell)
Full length; 3m, 3f. A participation play popular with high school audiences. A con-man sets up a kind of religious cult in a small town, having as its centre a young girl who claims to be in communication with extra-terrestrial beings. (PLA)

Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again (Warren Graves)
Full length; 8m, 5f. A melodrama set in the Old West, in Nellie's House of Easy Virtue. The plot revolves around Chief Shaking Spear, a playwright of the Plains, whose dramas have a remarkable resemblance to Will Shakespeare's! (PLA)

The Mumberley Inheritance (Warren Graves)
Full length; 5m, 3f. A melodrama set in Mumberley Manor at the turn of the century. Daphne is nursing her father, trying to get Rodney Stoutheart to the altar and awaiting the return of her brother Jack from 'the Canadas'. Enter the villain, Marmaduke Mayhem, and a good time is had by all! (PLA)

Scrooge (Warren Graves)
Full length; 5m, 2f. A lively adaptation of the Christmas melodrama by Charles Dickens. (PLA)

The Magnificent Slowpoke (Martin Lager)
Full length; 5m, 4f. Ubby, a slow-moving social misfit is given a track suit as a birthday present. His venture into the world of jogging spurs him to confront his past, and with the help – sometimes inadvertent – of a cast of zany characters, he makes peace with his world. Some very funny lines, and several very amusing scenes which students would enjoy. (PLA)

The Song of the Serpent (Betty Lambert)
One Act; 6m, 2f. Set during the Gold Rush in B.C's Cariboo country, Indian legends are combined with the elements of the traditional melodrama. A part Indian boy, a young 'proper' English girl and an ex-slave team up to overcome a money-hungry, mine-stealing blackguard. (PLA)

The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon (W.O. Mitchell)
Full length; 5m, 2f. Wullie strikes a bargain with the Devil, who turns out to be an avid curler. He wants to win the Celestial Briar. (CTR, no. 26)

And At Night We Dream (David Mutch)
One Act; 1m, 1f. The daytime worries and guilts of a suburban couple return at night in the form of frightening sounds, a strange Dream Man and absurd situations. Suitable for senior students. (PLA)

The Secret of the Spyglass (William Pendergrast)
Full length; 8m, 7f. A full-scale melodrama, suspenseful and comically entertaining. Female pirates threaten the existence of Kingston in 1824. St. Dick Mainstream, 'the hero of Dogger Bank', against impossible odds, leads the women back into the fold of good society. (PLA)

Shoulder Pads (Aviva Ravel)
One Act; 1m, 2f. Sophie, a 'managing' mother, has her daughter's future all planned, but her well-laid plans go awry in this farcical comedy. (BOOK)

Widger's Way (Gwen Pharis Ringwood)
Full length; 9m, 2f. A melodrama-farce about a stingy father, an innocent love-struck daughter, hidden gold, oil-wells and a murderer on the loose. (PLA)

Contemporary Drama:

Canadian Gothic (Joanna M. Glass)
One Act; 2m, 2f. A teen-age girl in a prairie town gets pregnant by her Indian sweetheart. The girl's father lashes out and is accidentally blinded by the boy in self-defence. (DRAM)

Solzhenitsyn (Alexander Hausvater)
Full length; 8m, 2f (could be expanded). A documentary drama bringing to life episodes from the life and works of the famous dissident writer. A cast of 10 portrays some 52 characters. For senior students; many good scenes which would challenge serious young people; lends itself to interesting staging. (PLA)

Teach Me How To Cry (Patricia Joudry)
Full length; 3m, 7f, extras. A high-school production of Romeo and Juliet stars Melinda Grant, a retiring, unpopular student, whose mother is 'strange'. A study of a shy young girl who tries to overcome the antipathy of her peers toward the outsider. Some interesting explorations of social pressures, opinions, reactions. (CTR)

The Shipbuilder (Ken Mitchell)
Full length; 8m, 2f, extras. A Finnish homesteader in Saskatchewan builds an enormous ocean-going steamship on his farm during the Dirty Thirties, to the intense opposition of his family and the community. Interesting story and acting roles for senior students. (CTR, no. 21)

This Train (Ken Mitchell)
One Act; 1m, 1f. Also known as *Wheat City.* On a ramshackle station platform in Wheat City, Saskatchewan, two of life's leftovers await the daily train. Rose delights in tormenting her easy-going victim, Billy, but ultimately discovers that her need for him is as great as his need for her. (PLA, NWP)

The Devil's Instrument (W.O. Mitchell)
Full length; 12m, 5f. A young Hutterite boy rebels against the restrictions of his religion and, after much inner struggle, leaves the community, as had his brother before him. (S&P)

Tub (James W. Nichol)
One Act; 3m, 1f. A windy March evening in 1969; the home of Rip and Christine Neville. Rip is 75 years old and lies dead in a tub; his wife is dying. A series of evocative flash-backs convey the frustrations of a 50-year marriage between an ambitious wife and a husband who never seemed to do the right thing. (PLA)

John and the Missus (Gordon Pinsent)
Full length; 14m, 6f, extras. Takes place in a dying Newfoundland mining town, whose inhabitants fight on, in the face of economic decline. The town is populated by a large collection of colorful, vibrant characters. Recommended for scene work and monologues. (PLA)

A Rope Against the Sun (Al Pittman)
Full length; 6f, 8m, extras. The townspeople come alive in this play for many voices. The town is somewhere on the rugged coast of Newfoundland, and the inhabitants live out their lives, their hopes, their sadness, their joys. A play reminiscent of Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood*, written with humor, warmth, poetic vision, vibrant imagery, and quite accessible to students. (BREAK)

Far As The Eye Can See (Rudy Wiebe and Theatre Passe Muraille)
Full length; 13m, 4f, some doubling possible. A collective creation, the action of the play was triggered by events surrounding the Dodds-Round Hill Power Development Project south-east of Edmonton in 1973-76. While situations and characters are invented (except for obvious historical persons) the play captures the spirit and force of the people – particularly the farming people – of Alberta. The introduction of three people from the past: William Aberhart, Princess Louise and Chief Crowfoot, provide humorous and satirical counterpoint. (NWP)

Fantasy-Drama:

For Crying Out Loud (Henry Beissel)
Full length; 4m, 1f. In a weird dream in which a revolution makes him a leader of a nation, Rocky, a teen-ager, learns about death, social responsibility, and the need for language. (GAGE)

Say Hi To Owsley (Isabelle Foord)
One Act; 5m or f. Recommended for Junior High. A futuristic science fiction play in which two Martians crash their space-ship on earth and cause panic among the public and the politicians. Topical and involving. (GAGE)

Think Again (Patricia Joudry)
Full length; 6m, 3f. Bloodworth and Kilfoyle are two surgeons involved in the transplantation of human organs – their particular field is the transplanting of the human brain, which is stored in the body of a baboon while awaiting the ideal human candidate. George, the baboon, begins to exhibit human characteristics but aided by his 'jungle vision' is openly critical of the 'civilized' world. A satiric, quick-paced, amusing play. (CTR, no. 23)

Frankenstein (Alden Nowlan and Walter Learning)
Full length; 14m, 2f, some doubling possible with male roles. The Mary Shelley novel brought to the stage in a poetic work which successfully recaptures the spirit of the novel. The play gains our sympathy both for the creature who cannot live among people who loathe and fear him, and for the scientist who intended only to benefit mankind. A challenging project for senior students. (CLARKE)

Listen to the Wind (James Reaney)
Full length; 5m, 5f, chorus and extras. A play within a play ... Young Owen fights illness and tries to get his parents back together, while putting on plays with the help of his relatives and friends. Good opportunity for scene work. (TAL)

Looking to the Past:

Buffalo Jump (Carol Bolt)
Full length; large cast, can be done with 11 players (with doubling). A colorful montage, written in conjunction with actors and directors of Theatre Passe Muraille. It is a political and social indictment of Canadian society of the Thirties, equating the workers' protest march to Ottawa with a herd of Buffalo about to be stampeded off a cliff. Satirical and comic, suitable for exploration by students, not only into the era, but into this style of playwriting. (PLA)

Marsh Hay (Merrill Denison)
Full length; 8m, 4f, extras. Set in a backwoods area of Ontario in the 1920s, the play deals with the spiritual paralysis and socio-economic climate of the times. Scenes could be explored and contrasted with Canadian life as depicted in other plays of the era. (S&P)

I Don't Care What It Looks Like As Long As It's Warm (Isabelle Foord)
One Act; cast of 5. A tragi-comic montage which pokes gentle but ironic fun at Canadians and our history. It deals with topics like ecology and consumerism, and prods the audience to develop their own opinions on significant issues. (PLA)

Fifteen Miles of Broken Glass (Tom Hendry)
Full length; 7m, 3f, extras. The play takes place in Winnipeg toward the end of World War II. Young Alex McNabb dreams of enlisting in the airforce, but war turns out to be not a very glamorous business when loved ones die, and the mushroom cloud of Hiroshima hovers overhead. A good family drama about the maturation of a young man during World War II. (TAL)

Lulu Street (Ann Henry)
Full length; 9m, 3f. The tensions of one man's family, set against the background of the bloody 1919 General Strike in Winnipeg. Challenging to produce in its entirety, but many interesting and amusing characters. Recommended for work on characterization and scenes. (TAL)

Charbonneau and Le Chef (James T. McDonough)
Full length; 32m. The power struggle between Archbishop Joseph Charbonneau, who backed the strikers during the Asbestos Strike of 1949, and the Premier of Quebec, Maurice Duplessis. Interesting scene work, a sense of history in the making. Good individual characterizations, valuable practice in group staging. (M&S)

The Komagata Maru Incident (Sharon Pollock)
Full length; 3m, 3f. In 1914, a steamer arrived in Vancouver harbour carrying 376 Asians hoping to settle in Canada. This powerful drama investigates the ignorance and racism which kept these passengers from landing. (PLA)

Walsh (Sharon Pollock)
Full length; 11m, 2f. This is a historical documentary depicting Sitting Bull's exile in Canada after the Montana massacre at Little Big Horn. Good scene work for all students, could be performed in its entirety by senior students. (TAL)

Sticks and Stones: The Donnelly's, Part One (James Reaney)
Full length; 9m, 3f, some doubling possible. James Donnelly moves his family from Ireland to Canada in order to escape prejudice and violence only to meet them again, head on. (POR)

The Rainmaker (Gwen Pharis Ringwood)
One Act; 8m, 6f. In 1921, the town of Medicine Hat, Alberta, hired a professional rainmaker to save their crops from a four-year drought. Impressionistic and poetic, with a wide range of characters. (CTR)

The Running of the Deer (Geoffrey Ursell)
Full length; 11m, 3f. The events of a single day in 1768 in St. John's, Newfoundland, reveal the conflicts between the local merchants, the British colonial government, the indentured Irish and the native Beothuks. (PLA)

Musicals:

Hoarse Muse (Paddy Campbell; music by William Skolnik)
Full length; 7m, 3f, chorus, extras. A musical play about Bob Edwards, the outspoken editor of the Calgary *Eye Opener* in the early 1900s. Sharp, irreverent, funny and appealing. (S&P)

Under The Arch (Paddy Campbell; music by William Skolnik)
One Act; 4m, 3f. An irreverent view of Western Canadian history, in British Music Hall format. (CTR, no. 10)

Superwheel (Rex Deverell)
Two Acts; 3m, 3f, basic minimum cast. Lively, witty and fun to perform. A play that acknowledges youth's fascination with the automobile, and looks at real-world situations and attitudes from the context of that excitement. Written for Saskatchewan's Safety Year 1977, it's an appealing play combining both entertainment and substance. Songs by Geoffrey Ursell, musical arrangements by Bob Bryanton. (COTEAU)

Anne of Green Gables (Don Harron)
Full length; 12m, 17f. Adapted from the classic novel by L.M. Montgomery, Anne is an orphan girl who is adopted into a farm family – Matthew and his sister, Marilla, in P.E.I. Her pluck and personality are her chief virtues as she overcomes her unfortunate beginnings to become the well-loved ringleader of the youngsters who people this warm, lively and amusing story. A perennial favorite with visitors to the Charlottetown Festival each summer. Music by Alan Lang. (FRENCH)

Pogie (Christopher Heide; music by Al MacDonald)
Full length; 3m, 1f (actors play music). The trials and tribulations of a family who all end up on Unemployment Insurance. (BOR)

Ready, Steady Go (Sandra Jones)
One Act; 6m, 6f. The adventures and romances of a group of dolls in an attic. (PLA)

Cruel Tears, a country opera (Ken Mitchell; with Humphrey and the Dumptrucks)
Full length; 6m, 3f, plus musicians and dancers. A modernized Country-and-Western version of Othello. Challenging, but worthwhile for senior students. (TAL)

Ballade (Arthur Samuels; music by Michael Conte)
Full length; 8m, 5f. Part fantasy, part reality, set in a fishing village in the Gaspé. The forces of superstition, fantasy and love collide in the story of the town and of Laure who has lost her lover at sea, but still waits for him. (PLA)

Juve (Compiled and adapted by Campbell Smith)
Full length; 5m, 3f, plus musicians. Adapted from interviews with 300 teenagers on the streets, in the schools, jails and detention centres of Greater Vancouver. A no-holds barred account of the adolescent experience today. Utilizes music and dance. Could be used as a model for creating a play with students. Warning: Very coarse language and unvarnished truths. (PULP)

Liquid Gold (Glen Thompson)
Full length; 11m, 2f. Rollicking and rum-running with a dash of piracy, on the coast of B.C in th 1920s. Good story line. Music by Bruce Ruddell, lyrics by Glen Thomspon and Tom Braidwood. (PLA)

Paper Wheat (Twenty-Fifth Street House Theatre)
Full length; casting flexible. In a series of highly entertaining skits, we learn about the lives of prairie farmers and the formation of the now well-known farmers' wheat co-operative. Good characterizations. The skits are humorous, sometimes sad, always revealing of the lives and struggles of prairie farmers who were trying to settle the land. (CTR, no. 17)

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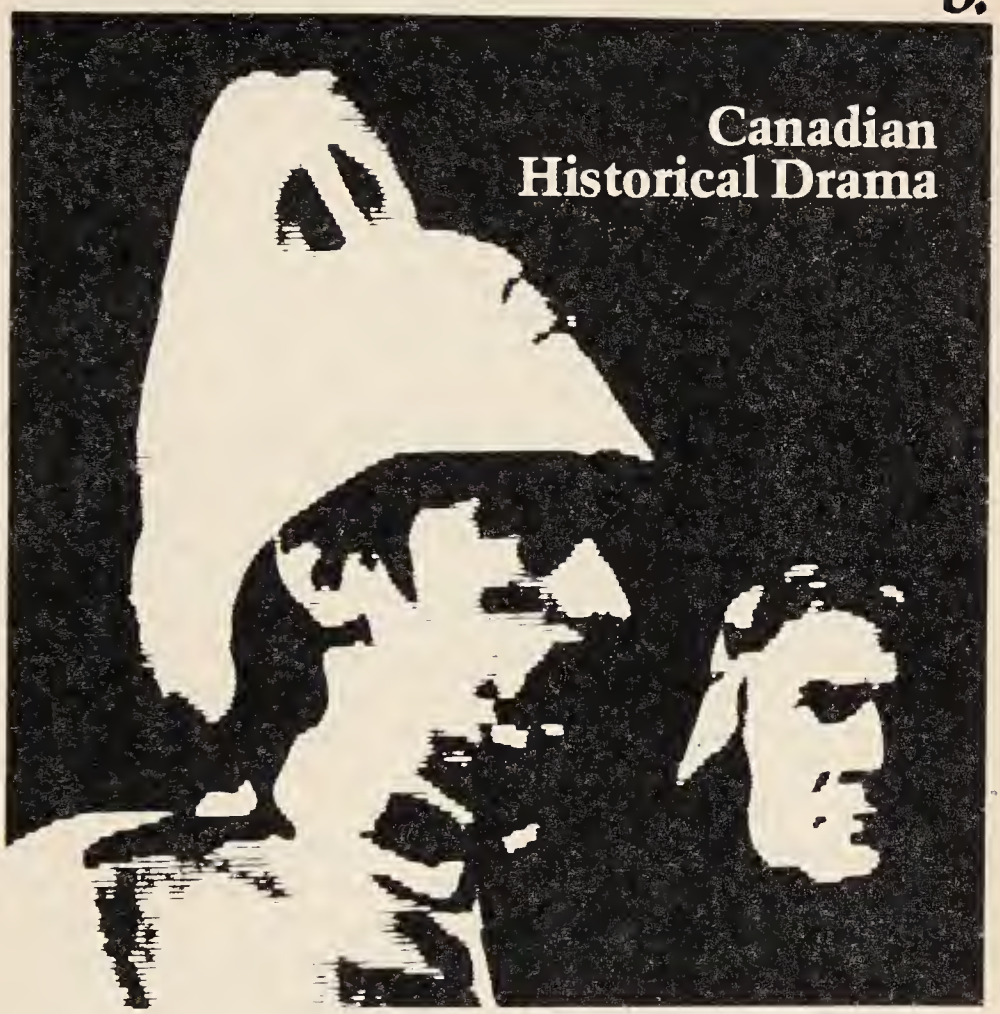


Introduction:

The contemporary surge in Canadian drama owes its existence in large measure to the need for an historical identity in English Canada in the late 1960s. Historical drama is perhaps the culmination of the dramatic literature of any culture. It requires age; youth has no real history. It also demands a consensus of viewpoint(s) which, in our case, is the knowledge of many disagreements. Rebels and outlaws have always had a favored place in our historical drama (Riel, Dumont, Almighty Voice, even Billy the Kid), because the outlaws and rebels see through the shams of the establishment.

There was no single war that was responsible for the origin of Canada, but hundreds of minor raids, invasions and police actions. Quebec was militarily conquered by the British, but continued to rebel and to assert its own culture. The native people of this country have several rebel heroes who held back the colonization of their land for a time. Riel is merely the best known of them all.

The plays in this section have been culled from the Canadian historical drama currently in print in English. There is no 'perfect' script mentioned in this chapter, but each has several strong points to recommend it for study. In discussing each work, the belief that all scripts are a means to performance is emphasized, but not to the exclusion of literary appreciation.

Regional history:

Regional drama about the history of Canada is, by its very nature, diverse in content and varied in form. The plays which are discussed in this section are based upon a number of different experiences that various groups of Canadians had as they struggled to come to terms with the country chosen for their 'new start' in life.

Many of the plays that are discussed expose barriers that these groups faced as they began in their new land: such barriers as those of exploitation, prejudice, government bureaucracy, even the barrier of their own fear. All of the plays demonstrate that the reward for their magnificent strength and endurance in the face of regional conflicts was one of tremendous personal growth.

The plays introduce both the English and Drama student to the many facets of the Canadian experience. Part of the challenge of the material is to make it speak to all Canadians – no matter in what region of Canada it is read, studied, explored or presented.

As Loved Our Fathers (Tom Cahill)

Political and religious conflict divides a Newfoundland family, the Hatreys, during 1948, the year that the citizens of Newfoundland must choose between self-government and union with the rest of Canada.

In his preface, the playwright explains the historical background of the play. Unlike the Donnellys in *Sticks and Stones*, who struggle and remain together, the Hatrey family is torn apart as they individually strive to make a decision about the future of their beloved Newfoundland. Two Acts. (BREAK)

For classroom work:

1. The play is essentially concerned with the loss of individual freedom. Discuss the reasons Con Hatrey had for voting against Joey Smallwood's idea of Confederation. To what degree were his reasons based on rational thinking? To what extent were they based on his fear of losing his own identity?

2. Con Hatrey's mother-in-law, Mrs. Roberts, plays a very important role in the play, although she never says one word. Prepare the following scenes for a class presentation:

a. pp.23-25 (The drinking scene);

b. pp.34-36 (The telling of fortunes scene);

c. pp.53-54 (The last sequence, when the Old Woman drinks a toast to the audience).

3. Prove that Mrs. Roberts is not only a victim of Hatrey's cruelty but also a catalyst for his anger. Does she deserve the treatment that she receives?

4. In small groups, create a family unit in which each of you is a member of that family. Decide on which roles you will take.

a. There will be a referendum to decide whether or not your province will remain part of Canada. There are valid reasons why the province wishes to withdraw from Confederation. Some of the family members are in favour of remaining part of Canada; others want to break away.

b. It is the day of the referendum. Each member of the family must convince the others to vote his/her way. What happens?

Sticks and Stones (James Reaney)

This is the first of *The Donnellys*, a trilogy of plays based on the story of an actual family, the Donnellys, who came from Ireland in 1844 to Biddulph Township, near London, Ontario. The family were nearly annihilated by a secret society formed by their neighbors some 36 years later. Their perseverence in the belief that man cannot be destroyed by insult prevails throughout the play and triumphs in the end when the Donnellys resist the efforts of their neighbors to drive them off their homestead.

It is an exciting play to work with in the drama classroom because the action carries as much significance as the dialogue. Not only is the language beautiful, but also the play itself effectively employs mime, songs and flashbacks. Particularly challenging to the drama student is the complex working of the transitional passages in the play. Senior level. Three Acts. (POR)

For classroom work:

1. One of the most important design images in the play is that of a man caught between the lines of his neighbor's or caught in the middle of something and unable to get free.

a. Find as many instances as you can of this image in the play.

b. How does this image emphasize Reaney's compassion for the Donnellys?

c. To what extent does it work?

2. The more the Donnellys assert their right to a civilized life, free from the prejudice and torment of the world around them, the more they find themselves forced to fight back.

a. In groups, discuss your opinion of the Donnellys.

b. Set up a debate in the classroom, using the above statement as a basis for argument.

3. Rather than dramatizing an entire scene, explore the choral passages in the play. Mrs. Donnelly's voyage to Goderich to plead her husband's case is particularly challenging (pp. 113-115). Not only do the actors have to physically

suggest the road from Biddulph to Goderich, they also have to chant, make sounds of barking dogs, etc. as Mrs. Donnelly goes on her journey.

4. Compare Reaney's account of the Donnellys with those of other authors: Thomas P. Kelly's *The Black Donnellys*, Orlo Miller's *The Donnelly's Must Die* and Peter Colley's play, *The Donnellys* (S&P). How does the treatment of the Donnelly case differ in each account?

Paper Wheat (Twenty-Fifth Street House)

The first act of this collective creation is a poetic interpretation of the story of the soil busting immigrants to the prairies. Through song and dance, monologues and scenes, the story of the settlement of the prairies is told. There are no dates or places or actual figures because the play was put together after countless discussions and interviews with some of the pioneers themselves. The second act introduces us to some of the important recorded milestones of the Saskatchewan Co-Operative Movement, with speeches based in part on the writings of the leaders of the movement. Senior level. Two Acts. (CTR, no. 17)

For classroom work:

1. Choose one of the following scenes from *Paper Wheat* to prepare for presentation:

a. 'The Marriage Proposal' (pp.50-52). **Characters:** Vasil and Anna.

b. 'The Broken Plow' (pp.52-56). **Characters:** Vasil, William and Elizabeth.

c. 'His Grain is Just a Bit Better Than Everyone Else's' (pp.62-64). **Characters:** Elizabeth and Anna.

2. What do the scenes show about the role of women on the prairies at the time of settlement?

3. As a class you are going to explore the concept of co-operatives. Decide why your class should form a co-operative. (e.g. Knowledge co-operative; transportation co-operative; lunch co-operative.)

a. Establish the rules by which the co-operative will operate. Make sure that everyone has a chance to voice their opinions and suggestions.

b. Some of you may feel that a co-operative is not a good idea. Make the others convince you that there is a need for this co-operative. The selling of this idea may take any form that you wish: a convincing advertisement; a series of well-presented speeches; an improvisation showing the ills that will befall the class if the co-operative is not established.

Native Peoples:

All the plays in this section bring to life racial prejudices and other social injustices which the white man has perpetrated against native people. Each one illuminates aspects of Indian culture. Each play presents a confrontation between native peoples and whites.

The following questions may be applied to all the plays listed below. (Additional work follows each listing.)

1. How did each of the following play a part in the destruction of the Indian peoples?: Settlers? Government? Army? Merchants? Traders? The press? The Jesuits? The Indians themselves?
2. Compare and contrast the values of Indians and whites.
3. What does the white man really want from the red?
4. Describe various ways in which the Indian attempts to deal with the white man.

The Great Wave of Civilization (Herschel Hardin)

The Great Wave of Civilization paints a grim picture of survival for the Blackfoot Nation in the wake of European immigration. In Montana and Alberta in the 1860s, the honor of Little Dog and the Blackfoot Nation meets the greed of trader Skookum Jim at Fort Whoop-Up. Demoralized by liquor, weakened by disease, war and starvation, he and his nation have no hopes of maintaining their proud way of life.

This play is a treat for the ear. The language is highly polished and often poetic. Music is used to comment on themes and moods. The white man's songs are satiric, humorous and occasionally bawdy, in sharp contrast to the Indian chants which cry from the soul. Two Acts. (TAL)

For classroom work:

1. What does this quotation reveal about the philosophy and life of the Indian? 'In heaven a warrior must sit still and sing hymns all day. I prefer to go to hell where, though in great pain, at least I can walk about.' (p.89)
2. And what about these?

a. 'great wave of civilization'

b. 'To sell is virtue!' (p.69)

c. 'The only good red man's a dead man.' (p.78)

d. 'A Christian's all right if he knows how to fight. How to slit throats and ask questions later.' (p.78)

e. 'The Black Robe is a man of peace. How lonely he must be among his people. I too am a man of peace who did not wish his lands invaded.' (p.86)

3. Explore the following scenes through workshops:

a. 'Traders offer whisky for all Indian's possessions' (pp.22-53).

This scene shows the heartlessness of the traders and the gradual breakdown of the Indians under the influence of alcohol. Even when Big Feet falls into a drunken stupor and freezes to death, they never once consider him a real human being worthy of assistance. The traders have what they want: all the Indian's possessions and Little Dog's wife, Sitakapoki, as well.

Pay careful attention to the gradual breakdown and pathos of the Indians in contrast to the growing excitement and heartlessness of the traders. What is the dramatic purpose of Bird Woman in this scene?

b. 'Little Dog's Revenge/The Death of Sitakapoki' (pp.95-110).

Little Dog had laid siege on Fort-Whoop-Up, enforcing a boycott on trade in revenge for losing his wife to Skookum Jim five years earlier. The tension grows between the traders as they decide the best way to end the siege without ending themselves. In the end, Skookum Jim, Sitakapoki and Shoots-in-the-Air are all sacrificed. Once again the traders are unaware of the tragedy played out before their eyes.

Try to build the tension to the climax. Note the contrasts in mood and character.

Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons (James W. Nichol)

Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons presents the meeting of Hurons and Catholics in central Canada in the 17th century. The clash of two such different cultures provides dramatic material for a reality that seems larger than life. Blackrobe, a Jesuit missionary, answers God's call to the New World, seeking the glory of martyrdom for Christ. He confronts Broken Rock, a strong Huron leader who angrily rejects his Christianity. Blackrobe, however, befriends Broken Rock's brother and eventually converts him to Christianity.

This play, a blend of realism and expressionism, expresses Blackrobe's state of mind throughout his ordeal. The use of 'the Martyr' to represent his conscience concretely presents the inner struggle between his dream of glory and the real world of disease and torture. When he rejects his dream of salvation, he also expells the Martyr figure with it. Nevertheless, his horrible death still screams of sacrifice. Perhaps his dream is realized after all. Two Acts. (TAL)

For classroom work:

1. By what means do the Jesuits seek to teach Christianity to the Hurons?
2. Why does Blackrobe become disillusioned with his mission?
3. To what extent does he satisfy his dream to die a martyr for Jesus Christ?
4. Discuss the dramatic effectiveness of 'the Martyr' as Blackrobe's conscience.
5. Explore the following scene through workshops: 'Creation Myths/A Funeral' (pp.20-29).

Blackrobe's attempt to explain creation is countered by Broken Rock's Huron version. Both Broken Rock and Sleeping Water ridicule the priest for his foolish beliefs. Blackrobe's conscience berates him to know real suffering, not just play at it. But when he witnesses the death rites of Sleeping Water's mother and sees the brothers scraping rotted flesh off her bones, he declares himself at the gates of Hell.

As a director, how would you clearly establish for the audience the difference between Blackrobe's inner dream world and the outer real world?

Almighty Voice (Len Peterson)

Almighty Voice is the angry tale of a young Cree Indian who defies the law in Saskatchewan in the late 1880s. Arrested for stealing a stray cow to celebrate his wedding with his starving family and friends, he thinks himself a hanged man. Preferring to die like a warrior and not like a dog, he seeks to make fools of the RCMP by counting coups. But his days are numbered. Indians and police alike die in the final skirmish and all for a dubious cause, the enforcement of a White Man's law that was meaningless to the Indian. One Act. (BOOK)

For classroom work:

1. Why does Almighty Voice resist the police? To what extent do you sympathize with his actions?
2. What techniques does the playwright use to keep the pace of the story moving? Be sure to mention the use of 'telescoping' or compression of time.
3. How does the playwright effectively use Indian chant and dance in this play?
4. Len Peterson originally wrote this play for a participating audience from grades 4 to 6. What is audience participation in theatre? What techniques does the playwright use to involve the audience in his play?
5. Explore the following scene through workshops: 'Theft and Murder' (pp. 16-32).

This scene manages to present Indian and white viewpoints on the action almost simultaneously. The story of Almighty Voice's theft, arrest, escape, pursuit and murder of an RCMP officer are all swiftly told.

What are the problems of the director in this kind of fast-moving narrative theatre?

Quebec:

The three plays chosen to cast some historical light on Quebec present the people of Quebec and their most particular relationship to the rest of Canada through the eyes of a wide variety of characters: the soldiers, officers, and aristocrats of Ron Chudley's *After Abraham*; the 'common man' and sports heroes of Rick Salutin's *Les Canadiens*; the politicians, University students, lawyers, secretary, and bourgeois mother of Gratien Gélinas' *Yesterday The Children Were Dancing*. All provide windows not only into the roots and present day realities of Quebec life, politics, and culture, but also into the Québécois character, and its unique position in the Canadian mosaic.

The plays present a range of theatrical modes as well, from the strict realism of *Yesterday The Children Were Dancing*, to the historical romance, à la Brecht, of *After Abraham* and the heroic (and comic) epic of *Les Canadiens*.

The problems and agonies of French/English relations today have their roots in bloodshed, foreign wars and intrigues, Church-State meddlings and imparted hatreds, all of which however distant still make their presence and

impact felt today in the lives of ordinary men and women. The three plays attempt to deal with these manifestations – through historical flashback, humor, the metaphor of hockey-as-French-resistance and the impassioned rhetoric of a young Separatiste.

After Abraham (Ron Chudley)

After Abraham begins with the ghosts of Wolfe and Montcalm observing Wolfe's funeral. The two men never met in actual life, and their growing relationship, as spirits, provides a throughline for a series of episodes depicting events leading up to, and including, the great battle on the Plains of Abraham, which both decided and provoked the English/French question in Canada.

The play is witty and robust, and presents an historical event in a more than palatable way. There are many roles for males (14, plus extras), but only one female role, plus a number of extras. This may be a limitation for high school production; otherwise its style and accessibility make it a suitable vehicle for production. Two Acts. (TAL)

For classroom work:

1. Themes: Explore the biographies of the major characters. Also explore the socio-economic situation of Canada, England and France at this period.
2. Exercises: Explore ordinary movement in period costume. Note how the costume forces you to move.
3. Additional: How does the 'blood still flow on the Plains of Abraham today'?

Yesterday The Children Were Dancing (Gratien Gélinas)

Gélinas' play is set in the present, in an elegant living room in Montreal. Though there is an act break, the action is continuous, and the time taken in the play is the actual running time.

An affluent and important lawyer, Pierre Gravel, is offered the portfolio in the federal ministry of justice. This dream is shattered by the revelation that his son, André, is the leader of a terrorist plot. They clash verbally and physically, and the depths of their ideological and emotional committments are revealed.

This is a well-made play, and follows that form closely. There are five male and three female roles. All are demanding in their need for realistic detail, their emotional intensity and honesty, and their rhetorical passion. It would be a challenge for a high school cast, in age range alone, for public presentation but is certainly suitable for workshop use, and ideal for script and scene study. Two Acts. (CI) See also Chapter 6.

For classroom work:

1. Themes: What purpose does the device of Gravel's speech serve in the play? What is the 'well-made play'?

2. Exercises: Research Canadian newspapers and periodicals of the 1960s for information on the play's subject matter.
3. Research 'Confrontation rhetoric' as a political tool.

Les Canadiens (Rick Salutin)
Les Canadiens is a delightful, thoughtful, and action-packed look at and history of the relations between the French and the English in Canada, using hockey, and a hockey game as the metaphor. It is set in the Montreal Forum, and begins on the plains of Abraham, when a dying French farmer-soldier tosses his rifle to his son, and it transforms into a hockey stick. It ends on the night of 15 November, 1976, and the election of the Parti Québécois during a hockey game.

This play is also a mini-history of hockey, to boot. It would be ideal for senior high school students for discussion, scene study and improvisation. *Les Canadiens* is a full-length play, and has a cast of nine-plus males, six females. The hockey metaphor is a real hook! (Salutin was assisted in the writing of this play by Ken Dryden.) Two Acts. (TAL) See also Chapter 6.

For classroom work:
1. Exercises: Mime study, especially for the skating: use sports games as physical rehearsal warm-ups.
2. Additional: Question the role of this sport as a unifying element in Canadian culture. Question the propriety and role of politics in sport, its reality and the use of sport in making a political statement.

Plays with National Themes:

Being a large and thinly populated country of several cultures, it is not surprising that only recently has Canada been able to claim historical theatre which is national in scope.

Quebec has always had a strong French tradition, rooted in the church and separate customs. Its culture, like so many other language and regional communities in Canada, has produced theatre, spectacle and holidays to preserve its identity and pass on its history to coming generations.

Only since World War 1 have there been enough people with a national perspective in this country to begin to produce art which reflected that consciousness.

Far from academic, our biggest fascinations as a country looking backwards seem to be for outlaws, war heroes, rebels and feisty politicians. Though most of these plays are fiercely partisan and rooted in thc region where they were written, several transcend the smaller spheres and speak to the nation. Such a character has been Louis Riel, variously an outlaw, martyr and saint, treated in several books and plays. One of the earliest was the Riel trilogy by John Coulter (see *The Crime of Louis Riel,* from Playwrights Canada for reference).

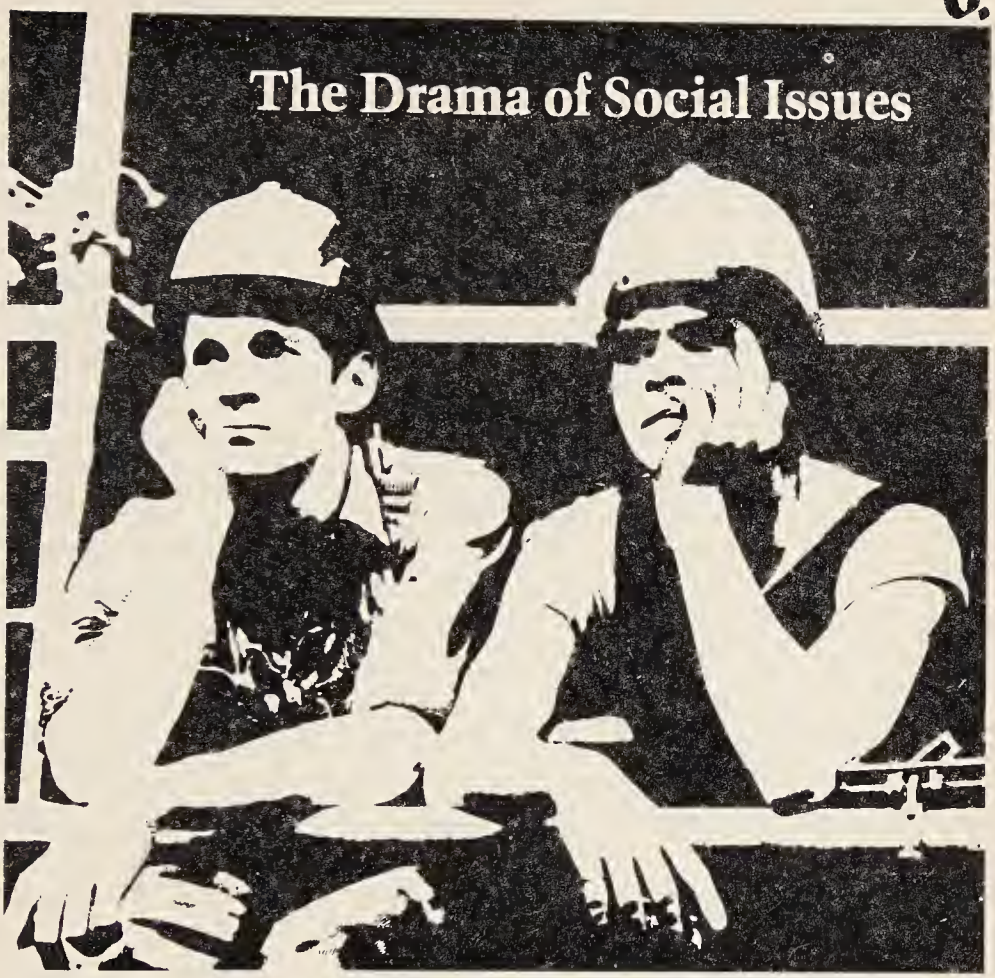
Because of its mosaic character, even the partisan plays can be fairly viewed as a valid part of our history. In that context all of the plays in this chapter could be included here, but only two have been discussed in detail.

Buffalo Jump (Carol Bolt)
Red Evans persuades a relief camp full of unemployed workers to march off to Vancouver to protest their ill-treatment in the Dirty Thirties. The group gathers other angry strikers and turns into the 'On-to-Ottawa-Trek', riding the rails 2,000 strong to present their grievances to Prime Minister Bennett himself. They get no further than Winnipeg, 1919, where labor was shown up by the RCMP. Actors must double or triple roles and create massive scenes using gesture and presentation alone. Evans and Bennett are made to stand for the opposing interests without being caricatured. The multitudes of other characters are but brief glimpses into real people who do not shy away from strong opinions in equally strong language. Lest anyone see this as a political melodrama, there is also abundant humor and music. Two Acts. (PLA)
For classroom work:
1. Prepare a summary of characters who represent different aspects of society. Summarize their views of the causes of and cures for the Great Depression.
2. Try to unlock the comedy in the tag day sequence (pp.42-47), both in analysis and in performance.
3. Recreate the background to the conflict between Evans and Prime Minister Bennett (pp.69-75). Cast the scene. Rehearse it and perform it for the class. Find out which people support each side. Ask them to explain their position.

1837 – The Farmers' Revolt (Rick Salutin and Theatre Passe Muraille)
This book is divided into two sections: an historical account of the farmers' revolt of 1837 with primary source material, and the script itself, which was created in rehearsals by Theatre Passe Muraille and Rick Salutin using this material to make scenes. The show has played extensively because of its energy, imagination and accuracy. It moves from the earliest settlement in Upper Canada to the executions following the abortive revolt. The piece leaps in broad strokes from scene to scene within this time frame. A vibrant William Lyon Mackenzie is drawn, not necessarily the real one, but a good embodiment of the views of the people of Canada before and during the 1837 rebellion. Two Acts. (LOR)
For classroom work:
1. Study Mackenzie's speeches and try to describe how he uses language to motivate people.
2. Try to deliver the monologue of the lady traveller on p. 219. What do you need to know to do it convincingly? Now try the rebel woman on p. 263.
3. Pick a primary source document in the history section and make up a scene of your own with one or more characters (for help see Chapter 7, Collective Creation

6.

The Drama of Social Issues



'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were.... Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'

John Donne, *Meditation XVII*

The Origins of Social Drama:

John Donne's magnificently worded sermon delivered around 1624 would seem to indicate the flourishing of a well-developed sense of social awareness but this, however, was not the case. Generalized thinking about the rights of all men, even 'the poorest he in England', would need to wait well over a century, until 1791 in fact, to find their spokesman in a young Thom Paine and his *Rights of Man.* Paine's ideas and those of a few of his contemporaries would again have to wait nearly another century to find their way into popular literature, novels and plays.

It is in the latter part of the 19th century that we find two new elements surfacing in drama – elements which have done so much to change the nature

of all plays written since. The first is the introduction of social conflict, that divides a community or nation and is of central importance to all the citizenry. The second element is the introduction of unresolved conflict onto the stage. Since its introduction, the drama of social issues has remained perhaps the most powerful of all our present forms.

But what of this form? Attempts to use the stage to educate the public date back at least to the Middle Ages with the use by the Church of Miracle and Morality plays. What was new was the emphasis on the dialectic of the situation, the presentation of a real social issue in miniature. The master dramatist of this new form was the playwright Henrik Ibsen with his disturbing insight into our modern western culture. George Bernard Shaw and Bertolt Brecht join him on this podium. Each of these writers attacked social complacency, although from different flanks.

It is in this area – dramas of social issues – that Canadian playwrights have contributed so much to our vision of ourselves as a nation, a nation both unified and divided. Writers like Sharon Pollock, George Ryga, Gratien Gélinas and David Fennario often make us uncomfortable and uneasy with our thoughts. They are doing their job well when they do that; we begin our part by seeing their plays, reading them and talking about them.

The major categories in this chapter are: (I) The State of the Nation and (II) The State of Mankind. These are not mutually exclusive, but they do have the advantage of allowing dramatic material to be organized around either national or more universal social issues. (Some plays, of course, include both.)

I. The State of the Nation

A. Biculturalism:

We are a nation with two recognized founding cultures. That fact alone makes us unique, but it has also provided us with a continuing spring of political and cultural unrest. While our various branches of government continue to struggle with this issue, their views are not the only ones that exist on the subject. What have our dramatists felt about the issue?

Yesterday The Children Were Dancing (Gratien Gélinas; translation by Mavor Moore)

The problems Canadians faced in 1967 when Gélinas wrote this most serious drama still face us. Pierre Gravel, a prominent Montreal lawyer, is offered the federal justice portfolio in the Pearson cabinet but he has not counted on the strength and degree of opposition which he will meet in his son, an ardent separatist. No easy resolution is offered either to the characters or the audience. Two Acts. (Clarke) See also Chapter 5.

Questions to wrestle with:

1. '... For my divided house will not go down without shaking yours to its very foundations.' Has the case for all Canadians been fairly represented in this play? Gélinas, for both political and dramatic reasons, has left the conflict unresolved. How would you resolve it as a politician? As a playwright?
2. 'The Voice of Women, in my day is going to be heard outside the delivery room!' Although Nicole states this bravely enough it is obvious throughout the play that the voice of women is heard politically only within the home. Has this situation changed either in English or French-speaking Canada since then?
3. Make a collection of articles from newspapers and magazines as well as relevant sections of biographies on the lives of the families of political leaders. What pressures do the families face?
4. Gravel: 'Say what you like and do as you please, you can't live without compromise.'

André: '... All the more reason not to give up.'

Contradictory statements, yes, but also the core of the political process. Can compromise solutions ever be lasting ones? At what level?

Les Canadiens (Rick Salutin)

Canada is winter; Canada is ice; Canada is hockey. We are a nation of inveterate symbol-producers and Les Canadiens has long been the archetype of Quebec and the bi-cultural situation. Following lengthy discussions with goalie Ken Dryden and other Canadiens, formerly or currently playing, Rick Salutin encapsulates within the framework of hockey our national divided past and Quebec's present state of political acumen. The play provides for those of us in the stands more than just an evening's entertainment: it gives us a penetrating insight into our symbols and heroes, their importance and limitations. The pace and tone of the play will make it equally appealing to students as a reading or acting text. Two Acts. (TAL) See also Chapter 5.

Questions to wrestle with:

1. 'What you have to understand ... is that ever since the Plains of Abraham, the French people have been number two, but on the ice, they're number one.' (Red Fisher, from the Introduction) Can this statements alone explain the incredible continued success of the Canadiens hockey team?
2. This play was published late in 1977. What has happened since in Quebec's politics?
3. '... one can be heartened at the sight of a people standing up for their dignity and asserting themselves ... And, beyond that, I think one can even draw some inspiration: if the people of Quebec can stand up for themselves, then perhaps the rest of us in Canada can do the same for ourselves.' (Salutin, Introduction.)

Have the various regions of our country put forward their claims too strongly? Can the whole continue to stand along with the parts?

B. The Multi-Ethnic State:

Racism is endemic in our society, in the daily life of communities, in what we teach and in what children learn. We have been slow to question our mono-ethnic assumptions as a country. The ethnic makeup of Canada has never followed this bland assumption and the voices of other Canadian ethnic groups are finally making themselves heard.

The Komagata Maru Incident (Sharon Pollock)

In 1914, the Komagata Maru, a Japanese steamer, arrived in the Vancouver Harbour with 376 potential immigrants from India. The Canadian government in the person of Inspector William Hopkinson, denied them entry under any conditions, even though they were British subjects. Using a ring of informants and a series of quasi-legal steps, Hopkinson managed to keep these people 'jailed' on board their ship. After two months of waiting, they were returned home. This ugly racial incident would have made a much larger blot on our record had it not been for the outbreak of World War I, when it was conveniently forgotten. Two Acts. (PLA)

Questions to wrestle with:

1. '... I am not ashamed, nor should you be, to state that this is white man's country!' This speech, delivered in the play as a speech made in Parliament in 1914, would not be made in Canada today. But has the thinking behind it changed any during the nearly 70 intervening years?
2. Tolerance is what is usually advocated as the method of adjusting to complex bi- and multi-racial situations. (If we only were 'tolerant' of one another, then we could get on.) Yet more than tolerance is needed to work out a framework for operating in such situations. What could be done to cope with a multi-ethnic, multi-racial society?
3. Hopkinson is depicted as hating most strongly what he fears others might discover in himself – his own mixed racial background. Rather than being a source of shame today, however, such a rich background is often a source of pride for individuals in the public eye. Draw up a list of singers, actors, and other public individuals who have made their mixed heritage known. How do they see themselves? How do others see them?
4. What is a 'Third World' country?
5. What is Canada's present immigration policy towards 'Third World' countries? What complications have resulted from these policies?

The Ecstasy of Rita Joe (George Ryga)

The Ecstasy of Rita Joe ranks as one of Canada's best known and most important dramas. The author has been compared to the Spanish writer, Lorca. Such comparisons are not fanciful either, for George Ryga has presented the audience/reader with a superbly orchestrated drama, the tragedy of a young

Indian woman who is destroyed by life in a big city. His stage-craft is brilliant, but to the reader often confusing, so that careful attention to the technical aspects of staging and lighting must be taken into account. Two Acts. (TAL)

Questions to wrestle with:

1. What would be necessary to change Rita Joe's life? Are political activist groups (Red Power) the only probable solution?
2. Can the Indian's culture ever be compatible with the white man's?
3. If Rita Joe had the chance to live her own 'perfect existence' what would that existence be like? Build your answer on material provided by either Rita Joe herself, or those who know her in the play.
4. Is Rita Joe's situation any different from non-Indians who live in poverty? Why or why not?

Cyclone Jack (Carol Bolt)

Tom Longboat was a runner, not a racer. Running marathons easily and winning handily through the early years of this century, the young Onondaga Indian never trained and didn't take his role of 'athlete' or 'symbol' seriously enough according to the promoters, trainers and fans who saw in him potential for firmly establishing their own dreams. At 28, Longboat, or 'Cyclone Jack' as he was billed, was finished as a runner while those who had surrounded him moved on. There is a definite music hall quality to this play with its songs, races and parades – just as there was in those early years of Tom Longboat's adult life. One Act. (S&P)

Questions to wrestle with:

1. Much is made of Tom's 'Indian-ness' in this play. His running, his lack of serious intent and his lack of sophistication were all attributed to his racial background. Can people be thus typified by their race?
2. The symbolic relationship of athlete and promoter means that one person profits economically from another person's abilities and skills. Is this morally right or not?
3. If Tom Longboat was the 'man of the hour' in 1907, Terry Fox was the 'man of the hour' in 1980, but for different reasons. Discuss Terry's courageous attempt to cross Canada and his reasons for doing this. What are the most dramatic elements in this run and how could they best be brought out in a play? Using collective creation techniques (see Chapter 7), devise scenes for a play about Terry Fox's life.
4. Tom Longboat said that there were other fast runners on the Brantford Reservation. Create a scene which takes place there between the promoter, Flannigan, the trainer, Ashley, Tom and one or more of these runners. Tom has returned to see his friends and the others have come along to recruit another 'Cyclone Jack'.

C. The Moral and Religious State:
Questions on the nature of God and the nature of true worship, the value of human life and the quality of that human life, emerge from our lives from time to time and give us considerable cause for concern when they do.

Bousille and the Just (Gratien Gélinas: translation by K. Johnstone and J. Milville-Dechene)
This highly readable play involves the audience in deep and real questions of guilt and innocence, both legally and morally. A family, seemingly devout and upstanding, is faced collectively with the full weight of the legal system. Bruno, the younger brother is accused of murder in a tavern brawl. In order to exonerate their brother and protect the family from scandal, they try to force Bousille, their simple-minded cousin, to perjure himself in court. The emotional and moral blackmail exerted on Bousille results in his suicide. No one is let off lightly. Two Acts. (Clarke)
Questions to wrestle with:
1. 'Let's save our prayers for the next time we're in a mess!' A mother's prayer appears to have been answered in this play. But at what cost?
2. 'This one is for your damned letter to Collette. And I've been saving it for you for two months.' This overheard statement could have hanged a man; without such a statement, he might well go free. How is this 'just'? Knowing what we know about Bruno Gravel and the situation, could we convict him of murder?
3. Order the characters morally from best to worst. Is naiveté a strength or a weakness? Is self-deception better or worse than acknowledged guilt?
4. The job of defense lawyer is to present his client's case in its best light; the job of the prosecuting lawyer is to do just the opposite, to make the accused look as guilty as possible. Somehow out of this, the truth is supposed to emerge and justice be done. Is this, in fact, the case?
5. Create a confession monologue for either Henri, Bruno, or their mother, heard by the local priest. Written and acted.

The Devil's Instrument (W.O. Mitchell)
Certainly music has 'charms,' a definite effect on all who hear it. Can it then be said to be evil, taking our minds from our more immediate tasks? This is the bone of contention in W.O. Mitchell's light yet touching drama of a Hutterite boy's desire to make music (with a harmonica) and his community's shocked and angered response to what they consider a sinful act. As in all Mitchell's work, bits of 'life humor' surface throughout the play making the apparent starkness of the Hutterite community both real and yet full of the vitality of life at the same time. Full length. (s&p)

Questions to wrestle with:

1. Jacob ends up leaving the colony for his music. At one level the decision is easy and apparent, and yet at another, it is agonizing and of tremendous consequence. In this sense the play has been an outward manifestation of an inner conflict and resolution. Could the play then be termed a 'morality play'?
2. Do both sides in this conflict receive a fair hearing in your estimation? We can understand Joseph's seemingly innocent desire to play music but what of the community's code? Do the actions of the community make sense to you? Set forward a written argument by Peter the Goose Boss for the banning of music in the community.
3. 'There are worse things, Jacob, than being lonely in the colony. You could be lonely outside the colony, too. Like your brother Darius.' Use collective creation techniques to show how Jacob has adjusted to his life 'outside'. (See Chapter 7, Collective Creation.)

II. The State of Mankind

A. Employment:

'Be it resolved that all adult Canadians in our society should be engaged in meaningful employment.' As a topic for high school debates, this particular statement, in one form or another, has been awarded a large degree of attention over the past twenty years or so, and even though a portion of those former debaters now sit in legislatures and plan programs to combat the problem, unemployment figures still continue to rise. And what of the 'meaningful' nature of employment? How many individuals would term their jobs 'meaningful?' What would they mean by the word?

La Sagouine (Antonine Maillet; translation by Luis de Cespedes)
This is the story of La Sagouine, a scrubwoman, a woman of the sea, who was born with the century, the daughter of a cod fisherman, and later the wife of a fisherman who took oysters and smelts. She is a cleaning woman also, who ends up on all fours with her bucket in front and her hands in the water. The setting is simply her bucket, her mop and her rags. Her audience is in front of her and all around her, but mostly at her feet, in her pail. She talks her life story to that muddy water of hers, with observations on work, youth, the lottery, etc. Full length. (S&P)

Questions to wrestle with:

1. What is your clearest emotional response to La Sagouine, the scrubwoman? Is it warmth, pity, admiration, astonishment ...?
2. La Sagouine's memories of Christmas differ so markedly from most of our own that it is hard to believe that she experienced this in Canada. Do you believe this still exists in our country?

3. We hear a lot about La Sagouine's husband, Gapi, during her monologue. Construct a monologue for him, based on specific information which you have taken from her descriptions of him and his general attitude towards life. Or select someone you know well (a friend, someone in your family) and set about creating a series of monologues about their lives, their thoughts.

John and the Missus (Gordon Pinsent)
The story is of a middle-aged Newfoundland miner, John Munn, who is injured in a mining accident but defies his wife's (The Missus) urgings to relocate. Although the play is strongly rooted in Newfoundland, the implications of this serious question of self-definition apply to us all. Two Acts. (PLA)
Questions to wrestle with:
1. Was John right to continue where he was? Could a man like this make a 'go' of it elsewhere?
2. Can this play be considered a tragedy?
3. 'We might have to go', they said. 'The mine is almost dead. They're diggin' up to the root. We've got to leave here.' (p.13) Discuss what the remaining characters would feel – for and against – moving, when the mine is dead.
4. There is a clear code of behavior for miners described in this play. What is that code? Why is it necessary and why is it also harmful to their lives?

B. Civil Rights:
There are many occasions when we feel our rights are being infringed on but when we know that our voice will count for little or nothing in determining the outcome of upcoming events. That is when we may join others to make our individual concerns collective, and to make our collective concerns known.

Far As The Eye Can See (Rudy Wiebe and Theatre Passe Muraille)
This intriguing play involves the use of an actual political issue which developed in Alberta as its central focus. The Dodds-Round Hill Power Development Project was scheduled to go ahead in the mid-70s, when suddenly it came up against the angry rural citizenry of the area who formed The Agricultural Protective Society. The play uses much more than a real-life conflict, however. It takes it form from Greek theatre, invokes Alberta's past in the form of three 'regal dead', and displays a level of raw conflict which other writers might well have steered clear of, but which depicts accurately the level of emotion 'generated' by this power project. Language and imagery, however, may prove offensive to some. Three Acts. (NWP)
Questions to wrestle with:
1. 'White men can never leave anything the way it was.' Discuss.

2. Are we deluding ourselves when we speak of 'progress'? Are we moving ahead or just moving forward in time?
3. Rudy Wiebe has described the manner in which he wrote the play with members of Passe Muraille, as one where they '... jammed the characters, situation, scenario – everything we could imagine about this play' for four weeks. Then he took his notes home and in eleven days wrote the script (later to be revised in rehearsal). Use this method to produce a drama on a concern of relevance to members of your group and present the final product to your class or community. (See also Chapter 7, Collective Creation.)

C. Institutional Reform:

Whether it's a prison, an orphanage, a senior citizens' home or a mental asylum, an institution of this nature has a certain air permeating it, an air of confinement, of loneliness, of human beings kept in less-than-natural surroundings. The best of these institutions give us cause for hope that this palpable air of human misery will evaporate; the worst confirm our fears that such will never be the case.

Fortune and Men's Eyes (John Herbert)

Fortune and Men's Eyes shows us the dehumanization process at work on four young men in a Canadian reformatory over an incredibly brief (6 weeks) period. The effect on the four characters isn't pleasant to absorb as an audience, and we are left with the strong feeling that the 'reforming' needs to be undertaken more in the judicial and penal system than in the individuals we see inflicting cruel punishments on each other. As a reader/audience, nothing is spared us – the language, the sexual tension, the intimidation and most of all, the subjugation of the human spirit. Two Acts. (GROVE)

Questions to wrestle with:

1. What should our penal reform institutions be doing for, not to, their charges? Is there any way of changing our system for the better?
2. Who are our criminals? What are their crimes? Is ours an equitable and just system? Do all stand equal before the law?
3. Read as much as you can about Canada's reformatories and other penal institutions. What are conditions like? Don't bypass opportunities to get first-hand knowledge from prison officials, guards or former inmates, if such resource people are available.
4. If possible visit your local courthouse and watch one or more cases in session. What are your observations of the judicial system?

7.

Introduction:

Since the early 1970s, collective creation has been a staple of Canadian theatre, exploring a vast area of social and historical concerns. Within the context of a co-operative process, actors, director and sometimes a writer work together to research and analyse a chosen subject, shaping the information they gather, and the insights they discover, into a play. The methods of work employed by groups such as Theatre Passe Muraille (Toronto), The Mummers Troupe of Newfoundland (St. John's), Mulgrave Co-op (Mulgrave, N.S.), Tamahnous Theatre (Vancouver) and 25th Street Theatre (Saskatoon) vary according to the experience and character of the people involved. Certain basic approaches, however, are fundamental to the development of every collective creation. These include research of the subject through print resources (newspapers, magazines, books), interviews and first-hand observa-

tion, exploration of the material through the process of improvisation and a final structuring of the material based on the fundamental rules of dramatic construction.

The collective creation is an ideal theatrical form for in-class activity and exploration as it involves participants directly in all aspects of the creation of theatre and offers a wide-open choice of subject matter. The historical and social themes explored in these plays are analysed in other chapters (see Index); the primary focus of Chapter 7 is the use of collective techniques for acting workshops and play construction.

Collective Notebook:

Christopher Heide, a Nova Scotian playwright, has been working with the Mulgrave Road Co-op in the field of collective creation for two years and in the summer of 1980, supervised a group of students at a Nova Scotia Drama League Summer School in the development of a collective play on the subject of work. He describes the project and the process below:

The woman behind the fast food counter was obviously the nervous sort. The two teen-agers leaning against the opposite wall watched as she rearranged the donuts for the sixth time. She dropped one. Things were getting out of hand. When a security guard arrived in a blue jacket the nervous woman waved him over.

'Those kids have been standing there staring at me for fifteen minutes. Get rid of them.'

The blue guard took a deep breath, 'Hey you two, what do you think you're doing?'

It was July. In Keith Hall, the Neptune Theatre's rehearsal space in downtown Halifax, the two teen-agers acted out their observations of the nervous clerk and the frightened security guard. It was all part of the preparation of a collective creation on the subject of work in the downtown core.

The collective creation format places a broad range of demands on all those involved. In this respect it is the perfect vehicle for diverse groups of varying

talents such as are found in the average school classroom. As with the teen-agers and the nervous clerk, subject matters close to home serve to complement the classroom approach even further.

Working with professional collectives, my first task as a writer is usually to gather background into the history of our theme or dramatic throughline. This is a job easily related to the school classroom. Discipline may require a guiding hand. In the same way that a director may predetermine the initial focus of a theatre collective, so too must a teacher assign the main area of research to the pupils.

In the case of the example above, the subject matter of the collective had been defined as 'work'. Immediately the resources presented themselves. There were books to be read, newspapers and magazines to be examined and, most importantly, real life situations to be investigated. There were people to be interviewed and to be observed. In the hustle and bustle of these requirements it is unlikely that anyone would question the original premise that was laid down by the teacher and director. Every discovery prompts another; with research and history as the guides, the path grows to become too important to allow deviation. In a rural community, students concentrate on stories of their past and find a new interest in their ancestors, even in their own parents. In the suburbs of a growing city, collective participants tackle a social issue such as land use or school amalgamation, learning the views of their neighbors and the prospects for their future.

With subject matter identified and research begun, the teacher, like the director of any theatre collective, must prepare to structure the eventual presentation. Now we return to our teen-agers and the fast food counter.

A prime rule of collective research is that it must be presented by the actors (be they students or professionals) to the group in a theatrical form. A student learns something of a worker's lot from an interview. And then rather than merely repeating her questions and her subject's answers, she must display her findings in the form of a 'scene'. This may mean involving others to recreate the situation most prominent in her impressions or it might mean a monologue as the character with whom she most identifies. In a theatre collective anything other than a dramatic rendering of information is incomplete. It is in the translation from fact to theatre that life is injected into research. Little by little that life begins to establish form and, with the objective eye of a director, or teacher, at work, a process of choice begins to develop.

In Keith Hall, we watched as groups of students, in twos and threes presented scene after scene of working situations gleaned from reading about and observing the daytime residents of downtown Halifax. In each capsule image the beginnings of a theme or intention was visible; clouded to be sure, but

visible nevertheless. Choices were being made. Students focused on what interested them most and presented not reality but a personal version of reality. The next task was to guide them closer to the truth.

Directing, like writing, is a savage art. With the various scenes at hand an immediate sacrificing of what is not essential cannot be avoided. Suppose we decide on a throughline that says 'People need to work. They are only fulfilled when working.' The group recognizes the priority of this theme. All else must go.

Cutting back is as important as building up and now both must take place in earnest. Unless a piece of research or a scene can be merged with the collective vision of the true theme, it has no place. If the research or scene contains a perfect grain of truth in line with the collective theme it should be examined, rehearsed and improvised until that grain is polished and clear, no matter how enlarged it may have become.

Improvisation is essential to the collective manner of working. The solitary expansion of plot and content traditionally handled by a writer alone is rendered obsolete the moment a larger group insists on creating a play together. For a group to go beyond the most simple analysis of a scene from research, improvisation by those involved becomes a necessity. Once again, the guiding hand is called for.

Following an improvisation, knowing when to stop and how to manipulate the subtle flow, is a skill that comes from practice. The best situations for the inexperienced are those where the teacher can afford to take time. Having decided a given scene is worth pursuing, it would be foolish to limit the number of improvisations attempted or the length of each. Repetition and lack of progression will be the deciding factors in halting improvisation and all concerned are likely to realize when no further progress can be made.

When the essential scenes have been chosen there remains only the process of finding an order for a total body of presentation. Here traditional factors such as exposition, plot, narrative, build, climax and moral come into play. It may be more worthwhile, however, to be aware of the process rather than the product of collective work in any first experiment. After all, the creation of something from scratch is a major accomplishment in itself. The glory of presentation can almost be abandoned to second place.

Following the most basic rules of collective creation then leaves us with a simple progression: research, scene renderings, thematic decisions, improvisations, structuring for presentation. The variations on this progression are endless, as illustrated by the many collective creations already produced in this country.

In Keith Hall, the teen-age students are wrapping up now, stirred by their own dreams of the careers that await them. They have examined these

dreams in the persons of others as a group and as individuals. They are richer for their participation; so are their teachers.

Selected Reading:

The following collective creations represent major work in the field from across Canada. These may be studied for the merit of the plays themselves, as a source for initiating dialogue on the subjects dealt with and as guideline examples of successful use of the technique. The reading and discussion of a number of these titles will hopefully offer a good jumping-off point for the development of your own collective creation. Think/Write/Discuss suggestions follow the listings.

Buffalo Jump (Carol Bolt)
See Index for listings. Two Acts. (PLA)

Let's Play Fish (Mulgrave Road Co-op)
The play is set in a small fishing community in Guysborough County, Nova Scotia. The action traces the development of a family through a period of about 30 years. The set is minimal and mime is used extensively to suggest props and set pieces. Three Acts. (DCNS)

The Mulgrave Road Show (Mulgrave Road Co-op)
A collection of songs and stories based on life in Guysborough County over the past 200 years, and a satirical look at the present political scene which continues to thwart the best intentions of the people of Guysborough. The play was researched and written by its four performers, who lived in Mulgrave, Nova Scotia, during its creation. One Act. (DCNS)

1837 – The Farmer's Revolt (Rick Salutin with Theatre Passe Muraille)
A lively, humorous and ultimately tragic look at Canada's only revolution for national independence. In a series of scenes, the key figures are defined and the human causes of the Rebellion are depicted. Study guide included. Two Acts. (LOR)

Doukhobors (Theatre Passe Muraille)
An historical epic. Beginning with the Doukhobors persecution in 19th century Russia and tracing their move to Canada and subsequent trials for burning, nudity and anarchy, the play is a sometimes comic, sometimes harrowing glimpse into one of the features of the Canadian mosaic. Full length. (PLA)

The Farm Show (Theatre Passe Muraille)
This is a record of Theatre Passe Muraille's version of grass roots theatre, vignettes of a full-blown farm community as seen by visiting city folk. There is no story or 'plot' as such but many stories woven into the themes of the play to create a picture of a complex and living community. Two Acts. (CHP)

Paper Wheat (25th Street Theatre)
See Index for listings. Two Acts. (CTR, no. 17)

Far As The Eye Can See (Rudy Wiebe/Theatre Passe Muraille)
See Index for listings. Three Acts. (NWP)

Think/Write/Discuss:

1. Collective creations are different from most plays in that the script is the last thing written. It evolves as a group of people strive to understand a present-day phenomenon or an historical event, and then to find ways of explaining what they have discovered to an audience.
a. Can you think of some advantages in writing a collective creation rather than writing a play? Are there disadvantages?
b. Which would you prefer to act in, a collective creation or a scripted play?
c. Improvisation is a very important technique used in the process of a collective creation. Explain why this technique is so essential.
d. Many other techniques are used in the collective creation. For example: Music often plays an important part in these works. Choose this and other techniques and explain how they were used to help the audience get a certain idea or understand a character better.
2. Many collective creations tell the story of the problems faced by people in different parts of the country.
a. How are these problems different from each other in different parts of the country. How are they the same?
3. In many religions and cultures people endure great suffering and sometimes even die for what they believe in.
a. Can you think of any modern day examples of this?
b. What is your opinion of these beliefs?
c. Can you compare any of your own experiences to the problems faced by the people above?
d. Have people in our society stopped standing up for their beliefs? Explain your opinion.
4. In a collective creation the authors often try to experience the environment of their subject before they write about it. What do you think are the advantages of spending time in the environment before writing about it?

Dramatization:

1. You are a famous character from one of the collective creations in this chapter. You have prepared a short speech which you will present before the press at a press conference. Your fellow students will be questioning you on your experiences and so on.

2. You can create your own mini-collective creation by following these steps:

I. In a group of 3 or 4 take turns acting out different character traits while the remainder of the group try to guess what type of person you are depicting. (This is like Charades.)

II. You now become a character of your choice with at least three distinct traits or idiosyncrasies. The others in your group will ask you questions about your personality and personal beliefs until they have a good idea of the kind of character you are portraying. When all of the group has had a chance to play a character, go on to step III. For example: you have decided to be a hermit, and have told the others so. Someone asks you if you get lonely. You tell them you have made friends with the bears.

III. Now that you have created characters, you are ready to weave them into a plot. You do this by pretending the characters meet and talk and do things together. You make up what happens as you go along, always pretending to be the character you've chosen. If you run out of things to say or do then stop. Talk about what happened in the scene and then try another one. This is called improvisation. As you discover things that interest you in one improvisation use that theme as the starting point for another. Your ideas will change and grow as you play the characters again and again.

IV. The main object of this exercise is to experience how a group creates something together. You may wish to present what you have done to the class.

3. Pick a subject or historical event that interests your group and make up a scene about it.

a. Read everything you can on the subject;

b. Interview people who know about the subject;

c. Watch people who may be involved in the subject. For example: the subject might be work. You can read books on working, talk to your parents or others about how they feel about their jobs, watch people working in a store, etc.

d. Invent a character based on your research and as that character, tell your story to other members of your group. Proceed to develop your scene as in the assignment above.

8.

Introduction:

Traditionally drama has been divided, rather neatly, into two gigantic blocks – tragedy and comedy – the latter being seen by some as a rather embarrassing country cousin that peevishly tends to reduce an audience to a crude, laughing mob. Laughter, for some reason is considered an unseemly response, not the sort of thing 'high art' sullies its hands with. Demonstrably comedy is, at its best, a very high art form indeed, and can be seen as such throughout history. In this century especially, dramatists attempting to express the turbulence of our existence have looked to comic forms as an outlet. The often savage probing of the style has led, with the work of writers like Ionesco and Beckett to a blurring of definitions and the rise of Black Comedy and Theatre of the Absurd.

There is no satisfactory definition of just what comedy is, of the area it encompasses as a field. It can be a snicker in the face of death, a slap in the face of pretension, or a simple escape from the weary humdrum of existence. A favorite definition comes from Mel Brooks: 'The essence of comedy is seeing somebody else slip on a banana peel.' Comedy is a release of energy, a way of

approaching our problems and fears that recognizes our own humanity in the trials and foibles of its protagonists. It may depend on wit and appeal largely to the mind, or get its laughs from broad action and slapstick situations. Characters may be blown out of proportion almost to the point of unbelievability (as they are in farce), or taken beyond that into the grotesque realm of Black Comedy.

Comedy written by Canadians expresses as broad a range of attitudes and styles as any in the world, and equally defies definition. Works like David Freeman's *Creeps,* an account of life in a sheltered workshop for the handicapped is full of savage humor, while plays like Jack Crisp's *A Wife in the Hand* can be, as one critic put it 'pure light diversion unsullied by intellectual or spiritually nutritive values.' Every section of this book contains comedies, as well as plays which use humor as a counterbalance to the more weighty elements of the work.

The main strength of the genre is simply that everyone likes to laugh. Students are no exception to the rule as any teacher knows. In fact, getting a class to stop laughing once they have begun is one of the most harrowing trials an educator can face. This, perhaps, has hurt the study of comedy in the classroom. Back in the days when the major source of all literary study was one of those huge anthologies of English Literature, the last item to receive attention always seemed to be the stories and poems that were unrepentantly funny. They were held in reserve for those dark days when lesson plans were not complete, or sickness brought in the substitute. They were used a bit like a lollipop in a dentist's office. When approaching the teaching of drama there is no better place to start than with comedy. Familiar with the genre from TV sitcoms and encouraged by the fun of a comic script, children find it easy to move into the action of the play.

The scripts in this section reflect a number of different styles of comedy, and comic situations. They vary in length from one act gems like the oft-produced *Love Mouse* by Sheldon Rosen to the big cast melodramas of Warren Graves. Please remember that these are merely a sampling of the material available. There is for example, no listing for the most popular form of North American stage comedy, the musical, which is dealt with in Chapter 4, Plays for Performance. Some of the large cast plays may be ideal for school production. Likewise some of the smaller cast shows will be useful for in-class exercises, offering an opportunity to break into groups and work on a number of scenes and plays at once. For utility's sake we've broken the scripts down into a number of groups, either by type or subject matter. From the world of superheroes to the foibles of family life, you'll discover our playwrights have found a lot to laugh about.

Melodramas:

The term 'melodrama' was originally coined to describe French plays which used music to heighten their dramatic effect. During the 19th century, when melodrama was in its heyday the genre had broadened to describe all plays that relied on effect to carry the piece. They were noted for broad characterizations, sudden unexpected turns of event and a heavy dollop of sentimentality. Modern thrillers are the heir to the true melodramatic tradition, but the form itself, as it fell into disrepute as serious drama, became a goldmine for the humorist. In modern melodramas like the work of Warren Graves, the traditional elements of the style are sent up for comic effect.

The comic melodrama is a highly popular form of entertainment which offers performers a chance to really ham it up. Because of the broadness of characterization used in this sort of play it is ideal for the inexperienced actor, and makes a good jumping off point for more difficult work.

Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again (Warren Graves)
See Index for listings. Full length; 8m, 5f. (PLA)

The Mumberley Inheritance (Warren Graves)
See Index for listings. Full length; 5m, 3f. (PLA)

Widger's Way (Gwen Pharis Ringwood)
A melodrama-farce about a stingy father, an innocent love-struck daughter, hidden gold, oil wells and a murderer on the loose. Widger has spent his life hoarding his money. When given a bag of gold for safekeeping by a mysterious and threatening night visitor, he finds the complications arising from his greed change his entire outlook for the better. Full length; 9m, 2f. (PLA)

Farce:

Farce is another French term and describes comedies which exaggerate character and situation to achieve their comic effect. Although not so broad in its context as melodrama, it offers the actors a chance to play their characters larger than life in the framework of a script with a more serious intent.

A Wife in the Hand (Jack H. Crisp)
A farce which begins with a little white lie, adds mistaken identities and snowballs through to an hilarious conclusion. A light, sophisticated story about a company president who, in his efforts to present a youthful image to an influential magazine writer, becomes hopelessly involved in a comedy of errors enmeshing his wife, daughter, nephew and their immediate friends. Full length; 3m, 4f. (S&P)

Love Mouse (Sheldon Rosen)
See Index for listings. One Act; 2m, 1. (PLA)

Fantasy:

The fantasy is not, per se, a comic style although it is often used in comedy. The basic premise of the fantasy is 'What if ...?' A situation is created which is outside the realm of possibility and then we are given a chance to see characters react and interreact within this context. This section offers everything from deals with the Devil (*The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon*) and animated comic books (*Hurray for Johnny Canuck!, Heroes*) to mad scientists (*Think Again*).

The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon (W.O. Mitchell)
See Index for listings. Full length; 14m, 2f. (CTR, no. 26)

Heroes (Ken Mitchell)
Superman and the Lone Ranger find themselves in a battle of egos while awaiting interviews with the mysterious 'Chief.' Tonto and Lois Lane arrive to raise the banners of Red Power and Women's Liberation and to replace the has-been heroes of the fans. One Act; 3m, 1f. (PLA)

Hurray for Johnny Canuck! (Ken Gass)
Based on the popular wartime comic book series, this free-wheeling romp through nostalgia and nationalist fantasies features the clean-cut Johnny Canuck, Superhero, as he deals telling blows to the Fascist war machine. Full length; 4m, 1f. (PLA)

Think Again (Patricia Joudry)
See Index for listings. Full length; 6m, 3f. (CTR, no. 23)

All in the Family:

Another basic comic situation relies on the interaction of members of a family. This is an area we are all familiar with and one explored extensively in television sitcoms. The plays in this section one way or another all deal with family conflict, offering a chance for students to look at events and characters in a situation familiar to them all.

Chester, You Owe My Bird an Apology (John Lazarus)
See Index for listings. One Act; 1m, 2f. (PLA)

Looking for a Job (Claude Roussin, translation by Allan van Meer)
Based on a Quebec family unit: the passive father, the domineering mother, the son lost in a world he never made but who wants a job. There are 8 main characters, some 43 others which can be doubled and tripled. Roussin takes the characters out of the kitchen and carries them off through their cultural fantasies. Full length; 12m, 8f minimum. (S&P)

Shoulder Pads (Aviva Ravel)
Sophie's husband and her only daughter, Vivian, accept her efficient management of their lives: so does her prospective son-in-law when she incites him to change careers against his parent's wishes. Sophie expects him and Vivian to be content with a mere gesture of defiance towards their parents. But her ruse fails. Their rebellion gathers momentum until her husband lends his support to the young couple. One Act; 1m, 2f. (BOOK)

Three to Get Married (Kay Hill)
The time is 1830. A Nova Scotian clergyman turns his home into a stagecoach stop in order to marry off his three daughters. Full length; 6m, 4f. (FRENCH)

Supplementary Laughs:

Additional funny plays to consider, although they don't fit in to any of the above categories.

Hunting Stuart (Robertson Davies)
A minor civil servant in Ottawa is discovered to be a direct descendant of Bonnie Prince Charles. Full length; 3m, 3f. (NEW)

The Elixir (James DeFelice)
In a medieval Spanish setting, a Charlatan and his Fool attempt to part the worthy citizens of a small town from their money. A richly textured theatrical fable, generously laced with irony. One Act; 6m, 2f. (PLA)

Creeps (David Freeman)
Stealing time from their work in a sheltered workshop, four cerebral palsy victims spit out their frustrations and, reluctantly, their dreams. They chat sex, personalities, scandal, despair, while their welfare supervisor pounds at the door. A work bristling with life and humor. One Act; 8m, 2f. (UTP)

Jitters (David French)
A comedy about the theatre and the insecurities and idiosyncracies of the people who work in it. Full length; 6m, 3f. (TAL)

Roundhouse (Bonnie Le May)
A spirited comedy, set in the 1920s, dealing with two harassed couples and an attempted heist on the transcontinental silk train. Full length; 4m, 3f. (PLA)

Stewed Prunes and Pickled Herrings (Marcy Kahan)
This play was especially written for acting students to introduce them to Shakespeare's works, life, contemporaries and theatre. May be performed by a cast of 20 or is adaptable to a smaller performance group. Full length. (PLA)

For classroom work:

1. Everyone can relate to the concept of heroes, a popular topic in literature.
a. Why do people have heroes?
b. Who were your heroes ten years ago?
c. Who are your present heroes?
d. Do you think you'll have the same heroes ten years from now? Why or why not?
(This question is of particular use in relation to *Hurray For Johnny Canuck!* and *Heroes.*)
2. One of the techniques basic to comedy is called unexpected substitution. The audience is led to expect one thing and another one happens.
a. Using the plays you have read, give two or three examples of the device described in the paragraph above.
b. Write a character sketch of at least one of the protagonists pointing out the inconsistencies that tend to make them less believable, and therefore funnier to the audience.
3. Recognizing the humorous side of life comes with experience and is usually seen in hindsight.
a. Give two examples to prove this statement using the characters in the plays you have read as examples.
b. Can you think of any experiences you have had that were anything but funny at the time, but seem quite humorous now?
4. Have you ever been so tense or nervous about something that you find yourself edgy and temperamental? (This is not an ad for 'Dr. Chase's Nerve Food'.)
a. Explain the situation and what you did to overcome it.
b. How might this affect an actor in the production of a play?
c. What suggestions could you make which might help the 'jitters' problem before a performance?
d. Is there any potential in the situations described above? Explain.

Dramatization:

There are hundreds of techniques which you can use to make an audience 'roll in the aisles'. Here are a few that have survived the test of time and are meant to be a springboard into the world of laughs. Hint: Learn to make a fool of yourself.

Role Reversal:

a. Brainstorming in groups of 2 or 3, compile a list of topics which would become humorous if boys played girls' roles or vice versa. For example: A debate on Women's Liberation, husband and wife fighting.
b. Do the same for parents and children, teachers and students or any other authoritarian situation. Try different situations and change roles to practice.

c. Try acting out a few of the scenes in one of the plays in this chapter with the male/female roles reversed.

Exaggeration:

Many a funny bone has been tickled by the skilful use of exaggeration on the part of the playwright.

a. You are a modern hero from the world of music, sports, TV, or whatever. Your partner is a TV reporter. You are interviewed and begin to exaggerate your replies creating a comic effect. How the interviewer reacts as he/she listens to your exaggerations is just as important to the audience. Choose several people to take turns playing the interviewer. Some of you may want to perform the scene once it's worked out or record the interview on tape.

b. Think of as many TV commercials or programs which you think are a joke and create a spoof on one of them by exaggerating what usually happens.

c. Exaggeration of body movements, without speaking at all can by very funny. Clowns often work like this. In pairs, work out some nonverbal skits using your body movements to exaggerate a situation.

d. Take one of the plays in the section and exaggerate the movements of the characters to create a slapstick effect like Laurel and Hardy. You could practice this a bit using a simple action like painting or looking for something you've lost in a room. Then try the scene.

9.

Introduction:

There is a strong case that can be made for drama as an act of aggression, if by aggression we understand a threat to our self-complacent acceptance of mundane life or a battering at our benevolent clichés of truth and goodness. Families often make for good dramas of aggression because in them – unless they are sentimental idealizations – aggression is a more familiar reality than tranquillity. Aggression is cruel, but often has redeeming significance in its cathartic effect. Think of the desperately haunted Tyrones of Eugene O'Neill, or of Hamlet's spoken daggers thrust into his mother's 'brazen' heart.

Playwrights show us the upheavals of family passions, the convergences and divergences of different generations. Their immediate focus is the pull of blood in all its undercurrents and eddies, but their theatrical epiphanies frequently illuminate other themes that spiral outward from the intimate swirl of domestic dissonance.

In Canada, our playwrights have done their share of testing these complicated currents. We have our own satirists, impressionists and parable-makers who show us how we build or break down the walls that crowd us into unwanted intimacies of mutual suspicion, fulminating folly, and exasperating wistfulness. Even when the mode is comedy, the undercurrents have a

seriousness. Perhaps this is because the best comedy, as Oscar Wilde once observed, is always serious in intent and is never for trivial people. In *The Blood Is Strong,* Lister Sinclair's satire of family life in a Scottish settlement in Canada in the 19th century, the hearth is often upset by the heart, for as the father says, 'A man doesn't make his home from rocks, but from hearts.'

On the one hand, we have Sinclair's 'Babylonish backwoods' where bears sometimes invade the famly berrypail. It is a rigorous world where pioneers allow their impulse for survival to lead them into purposeful deceit, as when they cultivate myths about the wonderful possibility of turning dandelion into coffee to rival the best Mocha in Europe. This is an Egypt for those who regard its geography and climate as plagues. But it is also a land out of bondage to the past. The MacDonald family have to bear the father's intemperate nostalgia when he glorifies the birthplace he quit. They all know that there is nothing so sickening as the patriotism of expatriates for their dispossessed country, and although Cape Breton is no place for delicacy, gentility, or refinement it is a testing place for the spirit, a new home that can be purchased only with birth and death, laughter and tears.

Sinclair balances the laughter and the tears, giving us a tragic drowning after a family wedding, but the blood is, indeed, strong, and the challenges of survival are won along with poignant insights into the divided tributaries of blood. Murdoch, curmudgeon though he is and hard on his family, knows that 'a man can emigrate every part of him, except his heart.' Sinclair's play follows the murmurings of that heart right unto its final, uneasy reconciliation with a new reality. Three Acts. (BOOK)

There is no such happy triumph of the hearth in David French or Michael Cook. In their plays, *Of the Fields, Lately* and *Jacob's Wake* the family inherits either muted benediction or fulsome curse. In both cases, death hangs in the air like the smell of lilies 'of the fields, lately' or batters the moorings of a haunted ark in which no family covenant ever comes to benevolent fulfillment. Both plays are about dying fathers; in both there are Biblical motifs about disinheritance and prodigality; and in both dramas the act of homecoming is a ritual that leads to both love and disaster.

Of the Fields, Lately, a sequel to *Leaving Home,* lays its emotional cornerstone on a trivial incident – a baseball game back in the summer of 1952 – at which young Ben Mercer, then a boy of twelve, is so ashamed of his father ('his dialect, his dirty overalls, his bruised fingers with the fingernails lined with dirt, his teeth yellow as old ivory. Most of all, his lunchpail, that symbol of the working man') that he cannot bring himself to ask how his father has enjoyed the game. The event is trivial, but Ben's opening monologue is a festering sore in his soul as it marks the wall between father and son: 'Sometimes you're not aware of the building of the wall, and sometimes you are, though not always strong enough or willing enough to kick it down.'

French's play triumphs over the mediocrity of situation and character because of its strong focus on love as a dumbfounding experience. In *Death Of A Salesman,* an emotional peak is scaled as Willie Loman is suddenly astonished by Biff's powerful expression of love. There is no such single moment of raw power in French's play, but our nerve-ends tingle, our hearts pause, our blood races as father and son make tentative, awkward gestures towards each other – their stumbling apologies, angry recriminations, and furious, nearly violent retreats, making a pattern for the labors of love. Love exists in the Mercer family, but it is hardly civil or easy. It has to find its way past suspicion, distrust, and bitterness, and it is a wound as much as it is a blessing. Two Acts. (NP)

In *Jacob's Wake* by Michael Cook, death once again brings apocalypse, but this time there are wild beasts in nature to terrorize the characters. Here, too, a dying father is the catalyst of action, and here, too, a son returns like the Prodigal. But this time, patterns are duplicated with succeeding generations, and the sins of fathers are visited upon their children.

If this sounds Biblical, it is meant to be so, because Michael Cook's play, perhaps even more than David French's, obtains many sharp ironies from Biblical inversions. In French's play, Jacob Mercer, unlike the Old Testament Jacob, does not manifest his tender love for Ben (Benjamin). Paternal love is there, but it is a deep secret. With Michael Cook, the Bible is an obvious reference by which to erect a structure and symbolism easily grasped by even those of us not particularly sophisticated in scriptural exegesis.

Jacob's Wake opens on Maundy Thursday in Passion Week, when one son, a disgraced priest, returns to his home in Newfoundland where his spinster-aunt, a family favorite of his, attends to her ailing, dying father. The business of his dying is protracted and painful – especially so because Skipper Elijah, a former captain of a seal-ship, refuses to go out quietly. Instead, he rages in furious madness at the spectre of death that threatens him in the form of a wild storm. His own mind is both against the storm and with it, even as he swings with his stick 'at the imagined, but real enemy, the spirit of death, the spirit of ice,' he is dying fiercely, and his own rush of passion is the internalization of the outer storm.

Skipper does not talk to the real people around him – not to the ministering Mary, his old-maid schoolteacher daughter, or to the vulgar, malicious, boozy Winston, his son. Skipper talks only to the ghosts of his past, imagining that he's still captain of a sealing ship. Winston feels dispossessed of his father's love, and he comments pithily: 'Talking to me father is always hard work, like reading hist're backwards. Yer own.' Skipper's only expression of love appears to be reserved for the memory of his dead son, Jacob, lost while seal-hunting and abandoned to the ice. Skipper's cold, solitary madness keeps him inviolate in a household pitching and rocking like a troubled ark on a fretful sea. Two Acts. (TAL)

Keith Garebian

For classroom work:

1. Discuss the influence of Biblical literature on *Jacob's Wake, Of The Fields, Lately* and *The Blood is Strong.*
2. What is the influence of the father on the younger generation in these plays? What are some of the obstacles between father and son?
3. Do these plays adequately delineate the position of the mother in the family? How has the role of women changed from these plays to current times?
4. Does the environment, in fact, have any strong influence on our culture and behavior? Is this evident in any of the plays?
5. How does the focus of family concerns shift in the plays, as we move from region to region?
6. What are the prime motivations for the characters' actions? Which are the stronger influences, family relationships, or environment, or outside forces?
7. Discuss similarities between *Jacob's Wake* and Synge's *Riders to the Sea,* between *Of the Fields, Lately* and *Death of a Salesman,* particularly (in the latter two), the role of Father and Mother vis-à-vis their son.

Supplementary Reading:

Several other texts explore family relationships and could be useful for classroom discussion and study. The range is wide, from Gratien Gélinas' *Tit-Coq* (see Index for listings), in which a young orphan values what he himself has never had – the strength of family – even with all its flaws, to Larry Fineberg's *Eve,* in which an elderly woman abandons her oppressive family ties in order to strike out, finally, on her own. We have listed several below under general (but not exclusive) headings.

Political conflicts:

As Loved Our Fathers (Tom Cahill)
Political and religious conflict divides a Newfoundland family, in the critical year of 1948, when the citizens of the Island must choose between self-government and union with Canada. Two Acts. (PLA)

Lulu Street (Ann Henry)
Set against the background of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, this is a bloody, bawdy tale of riot and rebellion, strike and strife, as tensions lacerate one man's family. Full length. (TAL)

Mixed Marriage (George Szanto)
A family drama set in the time period of the passage of Bill 101, Quebec's controversial language law, dealing with the forces that bring about the break-up of marriages and of nations. Full length. (PWM)

Personal struggle:

Aléola (Gaetan Charlebois)
Two old people celebrating their anniversary in the city, having given up their language and their land, wait in vain for their children to visit on this occasion. Full length. (TAL)

Leaving Home (David French)
Set in Toronto in the late 1950s, this is a realistic drama of a Newfoundland family breaking up. Violence erupts between the father, a man of little education, desperately trying to maintain his hold on his family, and Ben, the elder son, forcing him to leave home. Relationships between husband and wife and their sons are exacerbated by the educational and cultural gap caused by the family's migration to Toronto from Newfoundland. Two Acts. (NP)

After Baba's Funeral (Ted Galay)
A Ukrainian family in the Prairies gathers after the death of the grandmother. A touching and accurate social drama. One Act. (PLA)

On the Lee Shore (Christopher Heide)
David and Vicky return to the East Coast after three years at university, where they had lived together. Rather than alienate their families, they have agreed to marry. David, however, begins to feel stifled as his and Vicky's parents begin to take control. His rebellion is short lived, as his mother, a victim of an unhappy marriage herself, uses her dependency on his presence, love and affection, to draw him into the pre-set pattern. Two Acts. (PLA)

Fifteen Miles of Broken Glass (Tom Hendry)
The time is 1945. Young Alec McNabb, just graduated from his Winnipeg high school, dreams of doing great deeds. Ignoring the obvious fact that the war is ending, he persists in his passionate desire to become a fighter pilot. When the war ends, he is forced to make realistic choices about his future. Still, fueled by his dreams, he refuses to give up his search for something bigger and more exciting than the hum-drum life he fears awaits him. Two Acts. (TAL)

Wintersong (Carol Libman)
The impossible dreams of the 'old world' of pre-World War II Europe as depicted by Clara Nathanson, conflict with those of Anna, her daughter, who struggles to build a new life in Canada in the 1970s. Two Acts. (PLA)

The Devil's Instrument (W.O. Mitchell)
See Index for listings. Full length. (S&P)

Forever Yours, Marie-Lou (Michel Tremblay; translation by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco)
The story of the unfulfilled hopes of the mother and father, Marie-Louise and Leopold, and their two daughters, Carmen and Manon. The action switches back and forth over a period of ten years, the conversations intermingling. The four characters speak, dream, reveal their thoughts, without moving or looking at onc another, until the last two lines of the play. One Act. (TAL)

The Twisted Loaf (Aviva Ravel)
Old Bessie, lying in her hospital bed, dreams about her life as a young immigrant, her early married life, the children, the hard times, in an effort to understand, in her last days, the forces that have shaped them all. One Act. (S&P)

Hope:

Bonfire on the Beach (Greg Cook)
A family waits through a heavy storm, hoping against hope that the boat their father is on hasn't been lost. One Act. (DCNS)

Eve (Larry Fineberg; adapted from *The Book of Eve* by Constance Beresford-Howe)
Eve – wife, mother and grandmother – suffocated by the demands of others, receives hcr first pension cheque, and at the age of 65 decides to strike out on her own. She confronts enormous difficulties with humor, despair, a toughness and resiliency she did not know she possessed. Full length. (THEATRE)

10.

Personal Relationships

Introduction:

The majority of all plays deal in one way or another with personal relationships, exploring the interactions of friends or strangers, family members or chance acquaintances. David French's family-oriented dramas *Leaving Home* and *Of The Fields, Lately* are fine studies of personal relationships although we do not include them in this chapter (see Chapter 9, Family). Almost any play can be explored from the point of view of the human interactions they portray but in this chapter, most of the plays listed are psychological studies, depicting in detail the various facets of relating and experiencing. Central to these plays, whether dealing with a brief encounter or a deeper relationship, is some type of personal conflict around which the action revolves. The simplest conflict is that of opposing goals (as in *One Night Stand*); there are also clashes of personality as in *Chester, You Owe My Bird an Apology* and of expectation (*Head, Guts and Soundbone Dance*).

The encounters covered in these plays are varied. In some cases, the characters are strangers who chance upon each other for a brief passage of time. In others, members of a family are drawn into an unusual or difficult, and

generally tense, situation. Some of the encounters spring out of social situations (as in *Balconville*) and a community or neighborhood may be involved.

Whatever the nature of the personal relationships, the author almost always chooses to focus on details of the characters and how they relate to the world around them. The broader social or political implications of the subject matter are often present in the sub-text or theme of the play. (Most of Michel Tremblay's works belong in this chapter but even a superficial reading will show that the politics of Quebec are never far below their surface.)

The diverse nature of the works included in this chapter has prompted us to devise a wider than usual range of questions to assist teachers in planning a course of study using these plays (and others included elsewhere in the guide).

For classroom work:

1. After reading several of the plays listed in this chapter, form small groups, list and analyse the different types of personal relationships possible. This could include: relationships based on personalities (i.e. the meek man and the aggressive woman, the happy-go-lucky student and her studious friend); relationships based on roles (i.e. daughter and father, two brothers) and on occupations (doctor and nurse, movie star and reporter).
2. From your list above, create relationship situations which have possible conflicts and write them down, extending the descriptions as you go – i.e. a domineering, attractive older policewoman and a youngish, meek, sports car driving man.
3. With a partner, improvise a dialogue between these two characters. It might be helpful to try several situations and settings for this meeting before settling on the one which best shows your characters to advantage. Practice this a few times and either show it to another group or write it down as a dialogue and record it on tape.
4. Using one of the plays in this chapter, identify the main conflict between the characters. Next, chart what that relationship has 'going' for it – why the people are together in the first place. Present your results to another group.
5. What evidence can you find in these plays (besides the dialogue) that the relationships between the main characters are personal ones? Look for stage directions, movements and other nonverbal clues. If there aren't many, what would you suggest the actors use or do to demonstrate their familiarity yet suggest the conflict? You might choose a scene and work/walk through it, developing gestures and other stage business as you go.
6. In pairs, working from a personal relationship you have or have had, improvise a dialogue showing both the personal nature of the relationship and the conflict in it. You may choose either to open the scene with the conflict or build up to it. If this seems successful you may want to work it into script form and/or perform it for another group.

7. Not being honest, with yourself and with others, can result in a great deal of conflict – this comes under the general area of communication breakdown. Examine one or more of these plays to see whether this problem arises. What is the nature and cause of it? How often does the question of being honest, of not deceiving yourself or someone else enter your life? Look at *Operators* and *Chester, You Owe My Bird an Apology.*

8. Although there is conflict between the characters in these plays, interactions are not necessarily negative. Examine and compare some of the conflicts and compare and contrast the various character interactions.

9. Examine the setting of one or more of these plays. How do they precipitate the conflict between the characters?

10. After reading some of the plays in this chapter, try imagining them with different locales. You might also try changing the time period (move the play from the present to the 1880s or ahead to the future) and see how this affects the nature of the conflict. Is the conflict timeless, that is, something people have always had to face and will always be in conflict about? Or does it change or even dissipate the conflict when the time or place changes? Does this fact make the plays more or less valid and enjoyable for you? (See *Marsh Hay.*)

11. Take one of the key conflict scenes in one of the plays and rewrite it in another style. You may want to write it in your own words, in very formal language, in slang, in intellectualese, in gibberish, in another dialect or in Shakespearean English. Read the result to see how this affects the nature of the original conflict.

12. Alienation is a word synonymous with the urban environment and the 1970s. Examine plays such as *One Night Stand* to see how this issue (loneliness in the impersonal city) affects personal relationships. Consider how the time of year and the place of action affect the movements of the characters and the tone of these plays.

13. Expectations can be crucial, hence they are the stuff of dramatic conflict in any personal relationship. The generation gap is caused by different expectations, and what happens when they are brought out into the open as opposed to remaining unspoken and assumed. These ideas may be examined in such plays as *Aléola, Leaving Home* and *Of The Fields, Lately, The Head, Guts and Soundbone Dance* and *Les Belles Soeurs.*

14. In the process of adapting its own values, each generation makes changes in its codes. Agree or disagree using evidence from *Joker in the Pack, Teach Me How To Cry* and *Preparing.*

15. One very important change occurring in this century is the relationship of women and men and the roles they assume in society. Several of the plays mentioned in this chapter place the roles of women and their ideas and ideals in the forefront. Men, too, must continually evaluate and re-evaluate their

relationships. In groups, read study: *Soft Voices, Preparing* and *Operators* for changes in the ways men and women relate to one another.

16. Some material transcends time. Identify the areas in *Scrooge* that still apply today. Adapt an older story which, to you, is still contemporary.

17. In *Chester, You Own My Bird an Apology* and *Two Sisters/The Scream* compare the different types of relationships between brothers and sisters.

Selected Reading:

One Night Stand (Carol Bolt)
This award-winning drama plots the chilling consequences of a brief, violent encounter between a footloose young man and a lonely single woman in a city. Two Acts. (PLA)

Aléola (Gaetan Charlebois)
See Index for listings. Full length. (TAL)

Joker in the Pack (Charles Cohen)
A radio script, originally produced by the CBC, this play explores a common reason for teen-age dropouts and delinquency – insecurity. One Act. (BOOK)

The Head, Guts and Soundbone Dance (Michael Cook)
A drama of the changing times in a small Newfoundland outport. The people must adapt to a new life-style but Skipper Pete refuses to face the truth. His resistance to the present destroys all around him. Two Acts. (BREAK)

Plus One Minus One Equals (John Culjak)
An absurdist play employing exaggeration, distortion, and potential violence. Four people under the influence of a domineering mother conspire to bring down an unsuspecting man who happens to arrive at their weekly party/ritual. Two Acts. (DCNS)

Marsh Hay (Merrill Denison)
Set in a backwoods area of Ontario in the 1920s, *Marsh Hay* deals with the spiritual paralysis that inflicts its rural characters. It takes a long, hard look at the socio-economic climate of the times which created an atmosphere of grim helplessness from which few people ever managed to escape. Full length. (S&P)

Boiler Room Suite (Rex Deverell)
In the junk-filled boiler room of a derelict hotel, two refugees from the winter cold spend an evening together. Aggie and Sprugg map out a miniature world

for themselves, talking about their pasts. They drink, play games and reveal the disappointments and failures that have driven them to this temporary subterranean home. Aggie Rose, former actress, and Sprugg, failed poet and knight of the road and their dreams of a kinder world. Two Acts. (TAL)

Balconville (David Fennario)
Three families and the neighborhood drunk sit on their balconies in the Montreal summer. It is election time. Gaetan Bolduc drives up making political promises over a car's loudspeaker. There is Elvis Presley music in the background. The English *and* French-Canadian working class take on the Establishment. Two Acts. (TAL)

You're Gonna Be Alright, Jamie Boy (David Freeman)
An unsentimental and sometimes biting look at television and its effect on people's lives. Jamie has just returned home after suffering a nervous breakdown at college. His attempts to regain his footing are threatened by his family's insensitivity. A moving satire on the way in which people allow themselves to be shaped by the content and manners of the TV programs they devour. For senior students. Full length. (TAL)

Sweet and Sour Pickles (Ted Galay)
Olenka, 57, has invited Emil, the man she has been seeing since the death of her husband, to a family wedding. As she and her sister-in-law make pickles one afternoon, Olenka finds the courage to broach the subject. Both women reveal their youthful dreams and in the process, revive their longtime friendship. One Act. (PLA)

Tit-Coq (Gratien Gélinas; translation by Kenneth Johnstone)
The play follows a young orphan, Tit-Coq from 1942 through World War Two, when he returns. Befriended by an army buddy and his family, Tit-Coq clings to the family as a source of refuge and falls in love with his friend's sister. He returns from the war to find her married, but they still love each other. Realizing an illicit union would deny his children the opportunities and stability of family he has craved all his life, he leaves. Two Acts. (CLARKE)

Two Sisters/The Scream (Christopher Heide)
Two sisters explore the boundaries of the world in which they are trapped. Completely dependent upon each other, they have established a pattern of ritual. Breaking that pattern would mean the destruction of both. Expressionistic. One Act. (DCNS)

Operators (Margaret Hollingsworth)
Three women find that their lives are dramatically changed while working

the night shift in a factory in Northern Ontario. The probing of the youngest leads to disturbing revelations about the fears and dependencies of the older two. One Act. (PLA)

Teach Me How To Cry (Patricia Joudry)
See Index for listings. Full length. (CTR)

Chester, You Owe My Bird An Apology (John Lazarus)
See Index for listings. One Act. (PLA)

Dispossessed (Aviva Ravel)
A depiction of the betrayal and helplessness of an old, unmarried couple and their 'strange' son. Rachel, the 64-year-old breadwinner sustains herself with the memory of one marvellous month when she was young. Her friend and protector, Seymour, gave up his family and position to help her and still hopes for her love; her 40-year-old son, Benjie, lives in expectation of one big break. This is a poetic yet strongly realistic drama about the trials and dreams of ordinary people. One Act. (PLA)

Soft Voices (Aviva Ravel)
After 15 years, two friends meet and spend an evening reminiscing and evaluating their lives as career woman and homemaker. One Act. (S&P)

Preparing (Beverley Simons)
In a monologue, a woman traces the conflicts of her life from birth to death and finally liberates herself from her children and grandchildren. One Act. (TAL)

After the Ceremony (George Szanto)
A black comedy-drama about two ex-POWs returned home from Viet Nam. One has great difficulty in readapting, the other turns into a Jim Jones-type guru. The play is set in Montreal where the first one now lives. Full length. (PLA)

Les Belles Soeurs (Michel Tremblay; Translation by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco)
Germaine Lauzon has just won a million trading stamps in a lottery. She invites her housewife friends over to help her paste them into books. An evening with one dozen East End Montreal housewives mixing comedy and pathos, satire and compassion. Full length. (TAL)

11.

Experiments

Introduction:

Only a small proportion of the experimental drama of any country lives long enough to be recorded or published. By its very nature it is transitory – it takes risks and often fails to meet audience expectations and is often based on action rather than words. This makes it difficult to record it in the printed media and in part accounts for the paucity of published works of experimental theatre in the body of Canadian drama.

A definition of the word experimental may give us another clue to this absence. An experiment is made from experience, or as a result of experience. If we take this experience to be the theatrical rather than the life experience, we will realize that Canadian drama has such a short history that playwrights have had very little time to absorb the experience of theatre. Likewise theatre and audiences have had too little time to find their way into the more established forms of drama and have been reluctant to encourage or accept experimental forms.

In all arts and sciences it requires a maturing and a sense of historical perspective for experiments to be carried out boldly rather than tentatively. In

Canada we have very few historical precedents for the experimental form. Canadian theatre is still in its infancy compared with that of many European and Asian countries. All but the best of the experimental works from these cultures seem somewhat irrelevant to the Canadian experience, and we can only wait and assume that with time our own experimental forms will begin to evolve.

In theatre the term 'experimental' can mean many things because theatre itself includes many forms. Any of the elements of theatre is fair game for experimentation: script, set, costumes, lighting, acting, direction, audience, etc. The focus of this chapter is on the script, the words that are translated into three dimensional performance. But even a script can be broken down into its elements as Aristotle pointed out in his *Poetics* over two thousand years ago, making drama the first critically defined literary form. While some might argue with his breakdown of the elements of a play, it can be useful in analysing the experimental nature of any of the works included in this chapter. For example how does Lawrence Russell's *The Beautiful Woman and The Bleeding Man* challenge Aristotle's notion of plot and character?

Drama often follows literary trends and in the 1920s and '30s playwrights, particularly in Europe, were experimenting with futurism, surrealism, expressionism and symbolism, looking for a means of translating these literary genres into theatrical terms. Herman Voaden, one of the pioneers of Canadian theatre, was well aware of European trends. Many of his early works were choreographed, often closer to music than conventional drama, making use of a variety of media and influences by such masters of experimentation as Edward Gordon Craig.

Today few writers can ignore the dominance of film and TV in our culture, and playwrights are no exception. In some cases TV monitors may be brought onto the stage as in the work of Toronto's Michael Hollingsworth. Other playwrights concern themselves with elaborate spoofs of early movies (see the work of Hrant Alianak). There have been many attempts made to translate the more immediate, contemporary means of communication into the older, theatrical form. The imposition of one form on to another and the effort to break the boundaries between forms is an important part of experimental art.

One of the major experimental forms in which Canada has taken a lead is that of Collective Creation (see Chapter 7). Here the conventional script, the work of a single author is abandoned, and members of the group improvise – often based on real life characters and situations, and gradually shape the material into a play. Such plays generally have a social theme or may be of a documentary nature.

One-man shows also come under the head of experimental drama, since they do not follow generally accepted theatrical conventions. A single actor –

often the creator of the show – may play a wide range of characters in a single performance. Once again, as in many other experimental forms, performance often takes precedence over script, making this type of drama difficult to look at as a literary form.

A discussion of the experimental form should ideally lead out of an understanding of more conventional dramatic forms. Students might be helped towards an understanding of problems which can be tackled experimentally by being asked to write or improvise a scene where animals do the talking – the actors should find a means of conveying inner thought processes to the audience. Alternately students could write a scene using the premise of zero gravity and another with 50% gravity. How would they solve the problem of keeping the actors on the stage?

These basic exercises show how difficult it is to duplicate the intentions of the author/creator of an experimental work – so don't try it. Put your own imagination into play and *into* the play. The resulting effort, for students and teacher alike, will be far more stimulating than trying to figure out what it was exactly that the author was trying to say or do. Experiment!

Selected Reading:

The following plays are suggested for study at the Senior level. Questions for classroom work follow the listings.

Return of the Big Five (Hrant Alianak)
A collection of 5 short plays including *Brandy, Christmas, Tantrums, Western* and *Mathematics. Mathematics* is a play for, and by, objects, from a feather duster to a *Playboy* magazine. A comic-satiric average day of an average couple with no dialogue and no live actors. *Brandy*: a clearing in the jungle; The Big Guy, The Little Guy, The Dizzy Dame and The Dumb Blond. Fast and furiously funny action as The Little Guy wins the heart of The Dumb Blond. *Western*: Arizona, 1874. Three stage-coach travellers ambushed by 500 hostile Indians, hide behind some rocks in the hills. They discuss their situation and await their fate using dialogue that consists entirely of movie titles and names of cowboy stars. With tense music to heighten the immediacy of the moment. *Christmas*: This is a play without dialogue, but it is not a mime play. Characters talk to each other but not a word or a whisper is heard. A young couple, poor but loving, take a Christmas tree into their home. The tree (played by an actor) becomes a member of the family until, alas, it comes time to throw him out. An imaginative exercise for students. *Tantrums*: Dramatic and comic scenes depicting the absurdities of modern life. (FINE)

Herringbone (Tom Cone)
A one-man show in which George Herringbone, an aging Vaudevillian, recreates 15 characters from his life. Musical accompaniment. One Act. (PULP)

Stargazing (Tom Cone)
A rapid fire comedy. Two brothers and their wives gather on a Vancouver rooftop to watch the shooting stars. (PLA)

We Three, You and I (Bill Greenland)
An audience, expecting to see a play by this title, is instead presented with a harrowing, realistic appeal to give to charity, featuring an obsessed Matron and a crippled girl whom she cruelly manipulates to obtain audience sympathy. One Act. (TAL)

API 2967 (Robert Gurik)
A science fiction play. Two characters resembling Adam and Eve, citizens of a world 1,000 years in the future, relive the turmoils of humanity. Do they actually live or do their lives resemble an 'elongated death?' Two Acts. (TAL)

Dance for the Gods (Maxim Mazumdar)
A monodrama based on the life of a Greek actor during the time of Euripedes. The play concerns itself with the relationship between the creator and the interpretor of a work of art. In a series of scenes, Herakleon's life unfolds: his early failures as an actor, his development as a dancer and his deep love for his wife and son. Full length. (PERS)

Colours in the Dark (James Reaney)
A multi-media presentation of images, poems and memories of the terrors and delights of childhood. Excellent for chorus, voice and movement as well as stretching the imaginations and ingenuity of both actors and directors. Two Acts. (TAL)

Frugal Repast (Sheldon Rosen)
Based on Picasso's famous painting, this play brings the two Harlequin figures to life. One Act. (PLA)

The Grand Hysteric (Sheldon Rosen)
Brings together a disturbed man, his therapist and a tape machine. One Act. (PLA)

Mystery of the Pig Killer's Daughter (Lawrence Russell)
A collection of four short plays, each with a macabre twist: *I remember Dali when he was just a little kid and couldn't keep his nose clean, Monster, The Beautiful Woman and the Bleeding Man, The Mystery of the Pig Killer's Daughter.* Requires imaginative staging and a sense for the unusual. (ANGST)

Cowboy Island (Brian Shein)
The sacramental killing of Billy the Kid under the direction of a Moon Goddess figure is enacted. Alternately poetic, comic, threatening and mysterious, the play is an assemblage of materials to be adapted by a director into a variety of possible interpretations. Published with *Ground Zero, An Entertainment at the Café Terminus, Kafka* and *Rex Morgan, M.D.* (PULP)

Jerome (Donna Smyth)
A man is found on the seashore with both legs apparently amputated. He is cared for by local people and becomes a sounding board for the tensions and restrictions of life in an isolated Nova Scotian community in the 19th century, even though he never speaks. Some mime involved. One Act. (DCNS)

Murder Pattern (Herman Voaden)
An expressionistic presentation. The story of a Northern Ontario farmer who murders the neighborhood bully, is sent to Kingston Penitentiary and returns home to die of tuberculosis. One Act. (CTR)

Search for the Tse-Tse Fly (J. Michaël Yates)
An abstract play in which a hypnotist moves through 16 scenes manipulating people in an attempt to understand the nature of sleep and power. (PLA)

For classroom work:

Form:
One of the characteristics of the plays of this chapter is that each is an experiment to a greater or lesser degree of both the literary and the visual elements. New forms have been sought to accommodate the new subject matter.

1. A number of the plays consist of a series of short scenes either disrupted by, or held together by tape recorded sound, visual projections, or film. The effect is very different in each play.

a. Examine the dream-like quality the taped sounds and/or music give to James Reaney's *Colours in the Dark,* and J. Michael Yates' *Search for the Tse tse Fly.* Discuss.

b. Discuss the use of the tape-recorder in Sheldon Rosen's *The Grand Hysteric* in relationship to how it affects the sense of time in the play.

2. Look at how the Vaudeville-like presentation of Tom Cone's *Herringbone* is both a vehicle for, and a definition of the character.

3. An audience may have certain expectations when its members see audio-visual equipment and a tape recorder being set up on stage. Discuss how Bill Greenland manipulates these expectations and what they might be for his play, *We Three, You and I.* How do you suppose an audience would react to the play?

4. The use of theatre games and childrens' games are made part of the form in some of these plays. Discuss the use of games and the playwright's application of them in *Colours in the Dark.* Look for other plays which use games as a basis for the staging.

5. The use of objects on stage as opposed to characters is a little used form. Examine Alianak's *Mathematics.* What is the playwright attempting to say through the use of objects?

Themes:

The themes of experimental drama are strongly apparent in both the visual form (setting) and the literary form of the play. That is, the form is integral to the theme.

1. Many experimental plays deal with themes involving man's feeling of futility at his attempts to master his life, or escape the confusion surrounding his search for a reason for his existence.

a. Discuss the futility/confusion aspects of Sheldon Rosen's *The Grand Hysteric,* paying particular attention to how the form supports the theme in each play.

b. Modern man's confusion leads ultimately to his turning away from reality and relying heavily on fantasy to spare him the harshness of his life. How does this statement apply to Sheldon Rosen's *Frugal Repast* and *The Grand Hysteric,* and Tom Cone's *Stargazing*?

c. Escape is sought in sleep, in dreams, in darkness. Discuss the validity of such escapes by examining the success or failure of the characters in Lawrence Russell's *The Mystery of the Pig Killer's Daughter,* J. Michael Yates' *Search for the Tse-Tse Fly,* Tom Cone's *Stargazing,* and James Reaney's *Colours in the Dark.*

Characters and Conflict:

Generally speaking, in experimental drama conflict is internal rather than external. That is, the characters are enmeshed in a situation which illustrates a very personal conflict with the self as opposed to being involved in an action which puts one character in conflict with another.

1. Examine the following plays and analyse the source of the conflict: Tom Cone's *Stargazing* and Sheldon Rosen's *The Grand Hysteric.*
2. Experimental plays may deal with characters who are severely crippled in either a physical or an emotional sense. What is each playwright exploring by the use of such characters? Suggested plays for discussion: Donna Smythe's *Jerome,* Lawrence Russell's *The Beautiful Woman and the Bleeding Man,* Bill Greenland's *We Three, You and I* and Sheldon Rosen's *The Grand Hysteric.*
3. Another type of character which may be found in experimental plays is the stereotype. What value do you suppose the playwright saw in using stereotypical characters in the following plays: Hrant Alianak's *Brandy* and *Western,* Bill Greenland's *We Three, You and I* and Sheldon Rosen's *Frugal Repast*?
4. Experimental playwrights have relied heavily upon building plays around mythological figures. Discuss the possible reasons for this approach using Brian Shein's *Cowboy Island.*
5. How does the language of any of these plays both explicate and enhance the themes?

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Publishers' Guide:

ALIVE Alive Press
17 Eramosa Rd., P.O. Box 1283 Guelph, Ont. N1H 6N5

ANGST Angst. World Library
2307 East 22nd. Ave, Seattle, Washington 98112, U.S.A.

BOOK Book Society of Canada Limited
Box 200, 4386 Sheppard Ave. E, Toronto, Ont. M1S 3B6

BOR Borealis Press Limited
9 Ashburn Drive, Ottawa, Ont. K2E 6N4

BREAK Breakwater Books Ltd.
277 Duckworth St., St. John's, Nfld. A1C 6E6

CTR Canadian Theatre Review Publications
York University, 4700 Kecle St., Downsview, Ont. M3J 1P3

CLARKE Clarke, Irwin Canadian Paperbacks
791 St. Clair W., Toronto, Ont. M6C 1B8

CHP The Coach House Press
401 (rear) Huron St., Toronto, Ont. M5S 2G5

COMM CommCept Pub. Ltd.
470 Granville St., Suite 524, Vancouver, B.C. V6C 1V5

COTEAU Coteau Books, Thunder Creek Co-op
Box 239, Sub No. 1, Moose Jaw, Sask. S6H 5V0

DELL Dell International Canada Ltd.
c/o Howell Warehouses Ltd., 514 Carlingview Drive, Rexdale, Ont. M9W 5R3

DCNS Dramatists' Co-op of Nova Scotia
P.O. Box 3608, Halifax South P.O., Halifax, Nova Scotia N3J 3K6

DRAM Dramatists' Play Service
440 Park Ave. S., New York, N.Y. 10016, U.S.A.

FINE Fineglow Plays
10 Washington Ave., Toronto, Ont. M5S 1L2

FRENCH Samuel French (Canada) Ltd. Plays
80 Richmond St. E., Toronto, Ont. M5C 1P1

GAGE Gage Educational Publishing Limited
164 Commander Blvd., Agincourt, Ont. M1S 3C7

LOR James Lorimer & Company Publishers
35 Britain St., Toronto, Ont. M5A 1R7

NEW	New Press 30 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ont. M3B 2T6
NWP	NeWest Press 204, 10711 – 107 Ave., Edmonton, Alta. T5H 0W6
PERS	Personal Library, Publishers Suite 539, 17 Queen St. E., Toronto, Ont. M5C 1P9
PLA	Playwrights Canada 8 York St., 6th floor,, Toronto, Ont. M5J 1R2
PULP	Pulp Press P.O. Box 3868, Main Post Office, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 3Z3
SASK	Saskatchewan Dept. of Culture and Youth 11th floor, Avord Tower, 2002 Victoria Ave., Virgina, Sask. S4P 3V7
TAL	Talonbooks 201-1019 East Cordova St., Vancouver, B.C. V6A 1M8
THEATRE	Theatrebooks Limited 659 Yonge St., Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2A2
S&P	Simon & Pierre Publishing Co. Ltd. Box 280, Adelaide St. Postal Station, Toronto, Ont. M5C 2J4
UTP	University of Toronto Press Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1A6

Other useful addresses:

Centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques
211 rue St. Sacrement, Room 45
Montreal, Que. H2Y 1W9

Guild of Canadian Playwrights
24 Ryerson Ave.
Toronto, Ont. M5T 2P3

New Play Centre
P.O. Box 34091, Station D
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 4M1

Censorship:

Playwrights, and theatres producing their work, from time to time run afoul of censorship laws in their communities. Theatre Passe Muraille's productions of *Futz* and *I Love You, Baby Blue* were closed by the Toronto Morality Squad in 1969 and 1975 though the theatre was subsequently found not guilty on obscenity charges in both cases. Michael Hollingsworth's *Clear Light*, produced by Toronto Free Theatre, was similarly closed by the Toronto Morality Squad in 1973. More recent productions arousing public controversy and censorship issues were Ken Gass' *Winter Offensive* at Factory Theatre Lab in 1977 and Denise Boucher's *Les Fées ont soif* at the Theatre du Nouveau Monde in Montreal in 1978.

George Bernard Shaw observed that 'all progress is initiated by challenging current conceptions'. Theatre, the liveliest of all art forms, is often in the forefront of changing public conceptions on morality, politics and culture. To keep things in perspective, it may help to note that some of the plays that have been censored or suppressed in the past include Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Molière's *Tartuffe* and Shakespeare's *Richard II*, *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

While censorship of dramatic performances is usually resolved fairly quickly through court trial or public debate, censorship of published texts has a much longer and more profound impact. In 1978, the publicity surrounding Ontario's Huron County School Board's attempt to remove Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* from classrooms pointed out the widespread censorship of literature in our school system.

Freedom to read is a precious heritage. It is a part of a much larger heritage common to the human spirit which we call freedom of expression. The suppression of reading materials is suppression of creative thought. Without creative thought, democracy will eventually become extinct as people fall prey to the dictatorship of the few. Those who dictate what we may not read are in fact dictating what we shall read.

An excellent (and free) booklet discussing the censorship controversy (*Censorship: Stopping the Book Banners*) is available from the Book and Periodical Development Council, 86 Bloor St. W., Ste. 215, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1M5.

Copyright:

Copyright – the right to copy – means that whoever holds the copyright on a work is the only person who may copy that work or permit someone else to do

so. Copying includes publishing, producing, reproducing and performing.

It is not permissible to make copies of books by anyone, unless it is authorized by the copyright owner. Anyone doing so is committing an illegal act.

For more information, a booklet entitled *Copyright Act and Rules* can be obtained from any bookstore selling federal government publications, or: Department of Supply and Services Publishing Centre, Hull, Quebec K1A 0S9.

Obtaining Production Rights:

Canadian plays are protected by the Copyright Act of Canada – which means that if you're planning a public performance of a script (any event to which the public is invited), you must contact the proper authorities for permission. *This is true whether or not you charge admission.*

Royalty rates for amateur productions are reasonable, and sometimes even negotiable. Fees range from $15 and up for one performance; the more times you stage a show, the lower the performance rate.

Playwrights make their living from royalties so don't deny them their livelihood. Protect yourself and your students from embarrassment and litigation by legitimately obtaining production rights.

Most publishers include information on obtaining rights on the copyright page of the published script. This will tell you whether it is the publisher, the playwright's agent or the playwright who arranges royalties and payment.

When writing or calling to make your arrangements, include the following information: dates of performance, number of performances, where performances are to take place, number of seats in the house, admission price (if any), your phone number, as well as the name and address of the school. You will be quoted a rate and sent a letter of agreement which you must sign and return. Each playwright sets his/her own fees and time of payment, as well as royalties, do vary.

Touring Programmes:

Opportunities for bringing writers into the schools have increased greatly in the past few years. For more information on having a dramatist visit your classroom, write to: Playwrights Canada, 8 York Street, 6th floor, Toronto, Ontario M5J 1R2, or contact your provincial arts council or department of education to find out what is available.

Play Catalogues:

These are most easily obtained by writing directly to the publishing companies. Some of the best known are from:

Dramatists' Co-op of Nova Scotia
P.O. Box 3608, Halifax South P.O., Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 3K6

Guild of Canadian Playwrights
24 Ryerson Ave., Toronto, Ontario M5T 2P3

Literary Press Group
c/o Association of Canadian Publishers,
70 the Esplanade, 3rd floor, Toronto,
Ontario M5E 1R2

New Play Centre
P.O. Box 34091, Station D, Vancouver B.C. V6J 4M1

Playwrights Canada
8 York Street, 6th floor, Toronto, Ontario M5J 1R2.
The 1981 Directory of Canadian Plays and Playwrights. Synopses of 470 plays and biographies of 150 playwrights.

Samuel French (Canada) Ltd. Plays
80 Richmond St. E., Toronto, Ontario, M5C 1P1

Simon & Pierre
Box 280, Adelaide St. Postal Station, Toronto, Ontario M5C 2J4

Talonbooks
201-1019 East Cordova St., Vancouver, B.C. V6A 1M8

Other Aids and Anthologies:

And What Are You Going to Do For Us?
(Margaret Bard, Peter Messaline, Miriam Newhouse, editors.) Monologues from 39 Canadian plays. (S&P)

The Clinton Special
A 70-minute film about the making of Theatre Passe Muraille's collective creation, *The Farm Show,* with scenes from the play, interviews, etc. Available from The Canadian Film-Makers Distribution Centre, 144 Front St. West, Suite 430, Toronto, Ontario M5J 2L7.

A Collection of Canadian Plays, Vol. 1-5 (Rolf Kalman, ed.).
For a catalogue listing the 30 plays in these volumes, contact the publisher. (S&P)

Cues and Entrances (Henry Beissel, ed.).
Eleven plays including *Indian, Say Hi To Owsley, For Crying Out Loud, Ignoramus.* (GAGE)

Five Canadian Plays.
Includes: *Heroes, Babel Rap, The Twin Sinks of Allan Sammy, Cowboy Island, Hurray for Johnny Canuck!* (PLA)

Look Both Ways: Theatre Experiences (Herman Voaden, ed.).
'Mini-plays' and scenes for classroom work, both Canadian and other. (MAC)

Prairie Performance (Diane Bessai, ed.).
Eight plays including *Canadian Gothic* and *Wheat City* (also know as *This Train*). (NWP)

Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature.
Ten study guides, primarily intended for high school teachers. The titles are: *North and Native Literature, Coming of Age in Canada, The Immigrant Experience, New Land/New Language, Action/Adventure, The Family in Canadian Literature, Quebec Literature in Transition, Images of Biculturalism, Social Realism, Women in Canadian Literature.* Individual guides listed above $2 or $15 for the complete set. *Spotlight on Drama* $6.95; with complete set $20. Writers' Development Trust, 24 Ryerson Ave., Toronto, Ontario M5T 2P3.

Seeing Ourselves: Films for Canadian Studies.
Produced by the National Film Board of Canada's Education Support Program. Descriptions of NFB films under theme headings (French-English Relations, History, Native Studies, Quebec, Regional Studies, etc.). Write Publications Division, The Canadian Film Institute, 75 Albert St., Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E7. $3.95.

Stage One – A Canadian Scene Book (Andrew Parkin, ed.).
A variety of scenes from 29 plays. (Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1410 Birchmount Rd., Scarborough, Ontario M1P 2E7)

Ten Canadian Short Plays (John Stevens, ed.).
Includes *Indian* and *Lament for Harmonica.* (DELL)

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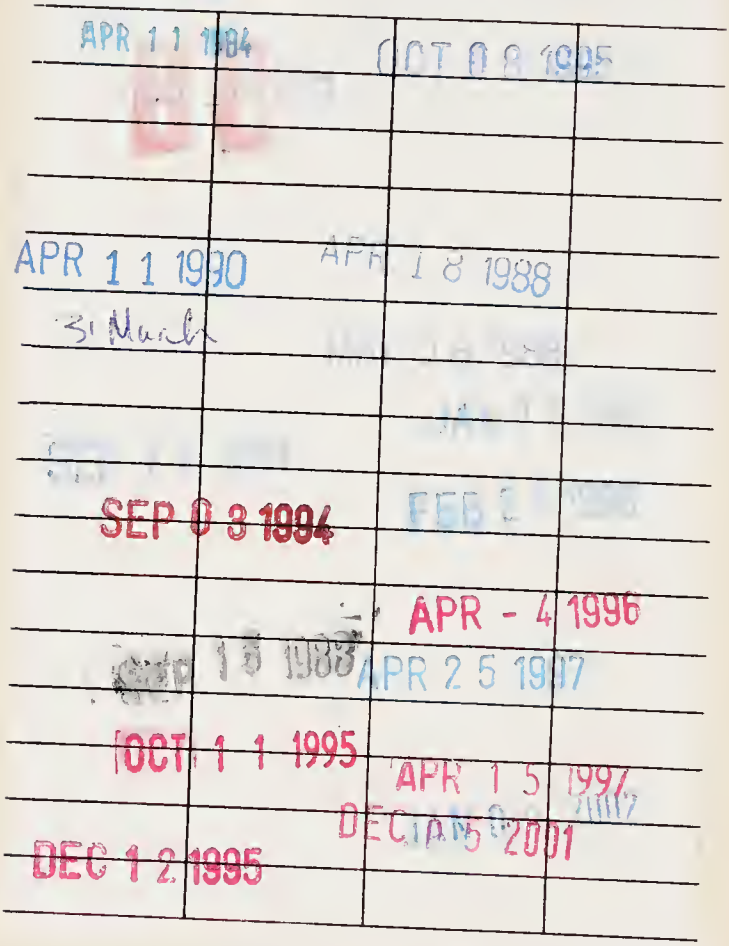

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